

012.505

11.11.21



THE SCENE IS CHANGED

Acc No.	20390
Class No	G.4.
Book N.	224

224



## OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY ASHLEY DUKES

### *Essays—*

Modern Dramatists  
The Youngest Drama  
The World to Play With  
Drama (*Home University Library*)

### *Verses—*

The Swallow-Book (*from Toller*)

### *Plays—*

The Man with a Load of Mischief, *comedy*  
The Dumb Wife of Cheapside, *comedy*  
The Fountain Head, *comedy*  
The Song of Drums, or, Ulenspiegel, *heroic comedy*  
The Players' Dressing-Room, *comedy*  
Such Men Are Dangerous (*from Neumann*)  
Jew Süß (*from Feuchtwanger's novel*)  
Matchmaker's Arms, or, The House of Assignation  
From Morn to Midnight (*from Kaiser*)  
The Machine Wreckers (*from Toller*)  
In Theatre Street (*from Lenormand*)  
The Mask of Virtue (*from Sternheim*)  
Mandragola (*from Machiavelli*)





*Howard Coster*

THE AUTHOR

25396

# THE SCENE IS CHANGED

BY  
ASHLEY DUKES

LONDON  
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD

1942

Checked  
1947

COPYRIGHT

*First Edition, February 1942*  
*Reprinted February 1942*

Acc No.	20390
Class No	G. 4.
Book N.	224

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

TO  
EDITH J. R. ISAACS

100-201

N.D.

## CONTENTS

<i>THE AUTHOR</i> . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	<small>PAGE</small>
1. PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT . . . . .	I
2. OLD GERMANY . . . . .	12
3. ZURICH — LONDON . . . . .	26
4. PEACE BEFORE WAR . . . . .	38
5. GERMANY, 1919 . . . . .	49
6. LONDON, 1919-21 . . . . .	59
7. EUROPE REOPENED . . . . .	71
8. SUCCESS STORY . . . . .	84
9. SCREEN REFLECTIONS . . . . .	96
10. EUROPE AGAIN . . . . .	104
11. FROM THE ORIGINAL . . . . .	117
12. ATHENIAN SPRING . . . . .	131
13. LAST LULL IN ENGLAND . . . . .	145
14. CALIFORNIAN SUMMER . . . . .	160
15. THEATRE OF ONE'S OWN . . . . .	174
16. ROME EXPRESS . . . . .	189
17. POETIC DRAMA . . . . .	201
18. EUROPEAN FAREWELLS . . . . .	216
19. NEW ENGLAND VENTURE . . . . .	230
20. AFTERWARD AND FORWARD . . . . .	243
INDEX . . . . .	249

# I

## PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT

THIS late summer morning in 1940 I am looking from a window that is among the topmost on the only hill of Western London. It was said of some Victorian philosopher that his eminence was due to the flatness of the surrounding country ; and so it is with this local height of ours, crowned by a reservoir and a water-tower in whose majestic Italianate shadow I have lived for more than twenty years. The inn on the crest of the hill, "The Windsor Castle", is so named because, until the embankment of the waterworks, the castle twenty miles away in the Thames valley could be seen from its upper floor. The wooded gardens of retiring mansions cover a part of our slopes ; and rows of less pretending but well-situated homes are occupied by rows of judges, lawyers, novelists and painters. Two main roads run westward out of London on either side of us, and their users scarcely know that we are here.

Much of London city is included in the prospect from the hill to-day. The true heights of Hampstead and Highgate, with their churches, close the horizon to the north ;



and eastward the dome of Saint Paul's and the towers of Westminster stand out dimly to mark the curve of the unseen river. The nearer and secular towers of Park Lane look over the foliage of Kensington Gardens. Sloping away in the immediate foreground are low-built houses with slate roofs, marking a group of poor streets ; and smoke blows every way from their crazy red tile chimney-pots, witnessing to Heaven that Sunday dinners are still cooked on kitchen ranges. In all this view, so harmoniously broken by trees and spires, scarcely any building but the distant pyramidal Shell-Mex bears the character of our own time. The architectural record spread out is that of a past century, mostly the nineteenth, varied by the few outlines of contemporary effort that men have contrived to make between the wars of the present.

If we should examine it closely, even the solidity of this existing city structure might seem dubious ; for in the wide landscape there are surely few houses that are not, like my own, crumbling and peeling from neglect. Repairs are forgotten in such times. Soon we shall know whether or not the physical survival of these roofs and walls and the multitudinous life within them may still be possible in any sense that we have hitherto understood ; and meanwhile they stretch away indiscriminately and rather beautifully in the sunlight, like the wrinkles of an ageing face that is content to age and has no impulse to renewal for renewal's sake. Were it not for the immense question-marks of our unfolding drama, much of this London would be renewed already.

The portents of the present are written in the sky, as

portents by tradition should be. Looking from north by east to south, I count a hundred barrage balloons tugging gently at their cables as they sway and turn in the breeze ; and more of them are merged in the haze over the docks and power stations. Near by a flight of pigeons comes wheeling, with little more direction than the many London butterflies that are abroad over the roof-tops this morning. A brace of wild duck, turning above Kensington Palace to beat back toward the Serpentine, show more will and purpose. So does a solitary crow, flapping high in one persistent line which all the cables will surely not deflect. A zigzag cloud unlike the rest, far above balloons and all, may be the trail of smoke-screen practice by some plane unseen. Soon, again, we shall know whether or not this strange sky is our defence ; and meantime its darkly dotted canopy spread over the city gives no effect of sinister warning, but rather of observant benevolence, lest in that domain of the past which forms the substance of human building, some evil action born of the present should strike and tear a gap.

Within a stone's-throw stands a building which cannot be mistaken for anything but a theatre. Its sharp elevation at the stage end which is nearest my home, its bare brick walls facing upon a side street, and its pretentious dome surmounting a stucco frontage, tell the whole architectural tale of a late-Victorian playhouse, the Coronet, built in close imitation of the West End model. To-day, and probably for good, this house is given over to the movies ; but a generation ago I saw from its gallery the acting of Réjane and the elder Guitry, the two younger Irvings, the first

performance of new plays by Miss Horniman's company, and other theatrical events. Then I was living nearer the middle of the city, but people came to the Coronet from all over London. Its prosperous years were the earliest of this century, when the Edwardian accession revived hopes of social gaiety and glamour. As an outlying playhouse it soon became eclipsed by the Court Theatre in Sloane Square, where in 1904 Granville-Barker brought the plays of Shaw one after another before the public. The Coronet had no such director or dramatist, else maybe it might have been a living theatre to this day. In the last and bankrupt stage of its career, I remember the bailiffs' men standing inside the box-office and raking the money aside as the public put it down on the counter.

Another stone's-throw beyond, with its gilt figure of Mercury hidden by the elevation of the larger building, is the little playhouse which I now direct, thirty to forty years later. It opened under its present name in 1933, with *Jupiter Translated* by W. J. Turner after Molière's *Amphitryon*; and for that occasion I had written: "Mercury being the god of commerce, it is strange that so few playhouses are called after him. We have nothing against his mercenary attributes, but we prefer to think of his dexterity and charm, his musical inclination, and his dalliance with the nymphs (whence Daphnis and Pan). Born in the morning, he had invented the lyre before noon, and by nightfall had enticed a herd of fifty away from his duller brother Apollo. May this be an omen of our own powers of lure, for we can find room for three times as many. . . . All this knowing well that the god escorts men through adventures, and protects

them in enterprises, and dances whispering prudent counsels in their ear."

Maybe the most prudent counsel in 1933 would have been to abandon the project, for seven bad years at least were before us ; but at the end of them the doors are still open. As surely as the old theatre, the new one is here. And this association of place and time in one section of a city gives me the plan on which to write about many years in the life of the theatre, in almost all capacities but that of actor, which I have never attempted. These years have been spent first as playgoer and observer of the stage of Europe, then as critic here in London both before and after soldiering in France ; as observer and traveller again, and by a twist of fortune I have never myself quite understood, as successful playwright and even best-seller ; again as writer about the stage and its art, and exponent of the modern theatre idea as a European understands it ; and latterly (for I decline to say finally) as interpreter of artistic theory in practice by the staging of certain kinds of plays, chiefly poetic, on a platform and under a roof of my own.

I know well how limited the interest of such a career must be ; indeed I feel it too personal to be considered a career at all. But perhaps for this very reason, the link of life and work with the actual prospect as seen from my window may be allowed to count for something. To me this London is not only a city but a hearth. And since a window without a house has no significance, let me add that in this house, having married an artist in her own profession, I have had daily pleasure in her mind and companionship, and wit and heart ; and here together we have bred and

reared children, two daughters to be precise ; and from here I have gone forth year after year to see many countries, from California to Greece, and to do many things that no Englishman may be able freely to do again in our time, or any American either ; and now here in this home, without indulgence of nostalgic longings for anything that has been or may remotely be again, I take the stand of reality and look on the past with the eyes of the present. This has been the time in which a man should live.

Away, then, from the present habitation of Campden or Notting Hill, whose " great grey water tower " was celebrated by Chesterton, and back to the early 1900's and gallery playgoing. I came to it fresh and eager from a university life whose dramatic experiences had been few but important — the seeing of Sarah Bernhardt on tour in *La Dame aux Camélias*, Irving in *The Bells* and *The Lyons Mail* and an execrable work called *Dante* (though this was probably at Drury Lane) : Mrs. Patrick Campbell in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, then the last word in fashionable sophistication : John Hare in *A Pair of Spectacles*, equally the criterion of comedy : Mrs. Kendal in *Still Waters Run Deep* and *The Elder Miss Blossom*, the founts of sympathetic tears : and such actor-managers as Charles Wyndham and George Alexander in current successes. All of these excited me, without affording a satisfaction remotely comparable with that of seeing Janet Achurch in *A Doll's House* or an anonymous touring company in *The Devil's Disciple*, not to speak of Duse in some piece of which I understood not a word. The strong impact of Ibsen and Shaw was due partly to intellectual curiosity, but also to prejudices left over from

a puritan upbringing, which inclined me definitely to dramatists with a moral to their fable.

Further, I was a graduate in science although an aspirant to the humanities ; and after brief patronage of such writers as Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, I turned abruptly to the dramatists of the Court Theatre. Shaw was of course at their head : the others were St. John Hankin, John Galsworthy, Granville-Barker in the days before the hyphenation of his name, and John Masefield and Laurence Housman among men of letters associated with the stage for the first time. Their new works were mostly presented at afternoon performances on Tuesdays and Fridays, and ran on those days for a few weeks at a time, leaving some play by Shaw (I recall *John Bull's Other Island* and *Man and Superman* especially) to fill the evening bill. A play successful in the afternoons would be promoted to the evening from time to time.

The acting standard was high, but the staging rather commonplace in its naturalism. Barker's direction was sensitive, shrewd, faithful. We were scarcely aware, even by report, of the richer development of theatre art which was even then proceeding under Reinhardt's direction at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. The work of Stanislavsky in Moscow and the name of Chekhov were equally unknown. But one or two of the plays of Maeterlinck had been translated into English and performed : the gaudy talent of D'Annunzio had been introduced by the visits of Duse and other actresses : the Stage Society had given Hauptmann's *Hannele* : and so it was just possible to realize that, in Europe as a whole, drama was not confined to the lifelike style of presentation which had come in with the

eighteen-nineties, and the proscenium need not necessarily stand for a "fourth wall". But on the stage of the Court lifelikeness was the rule, if the brilliance of a Shaw could ever be considered lifelike; and the plays capable of any other treatment were rare.

I had a special link with the Court Theatre and its audience through membership of the Fabian Society, the meeting-ground of socialist intellectuals who then included Shaw and Wells, and among the younger people St. John Ervine. In the Fabian circle it was generally agreed that the theatre was taking or should take the place of the church in social enlightenment; and no other serious function was assigned to it. Shaw had propounded such a dramatic gospel in his prefaces, and the rank-and-file of middle-class revolutionaries, indifferent to art though devoted to craft movements, never for a moment disputed his word. I was afforded a malicious sidelight on all this bourgeois socialism by evening visits to the Highgate home of Prince Kropotkin, author of *The Conquest of Bread*, who spoke freely and with personal knowledge of such men as Marx, Engels and Lassalle. Kropotkin had the scorn of a communist aristocrat for the entire middle class, whether socialist or otherwise; but in particular for bank clerks, who, he declared, could never belong to the proletariat because they wore top-hats. This may have been due either to his failing sight or to faulty observation throughout a lifetime: actually bank clerks had given up wearing top-hats and taken to bowlers (in America, derbies) some years earlier. But the mind of the great old man was a fine corrective to the homespun mentality of the Fabians.

The Court Theatre audience was the resistant force against which a dramatist like Chekhov had to make headway before he could be understood and eventually accepted in England. For there is no conservatism quite like that of the intellectual left wing ; and the " drama of ideas ", once it had crystallized in the argumentation of Shaw, tended to become the standard form in the forward-looking theatre. What naturalism had meant in the " free theatres " of Europe in the 1890's, intellectualism began to mean to the Court Theatre group and their followers. No other writer had Shaw's entertainment value, which was the true foundation of the movement. Both Galsworthy and Barker were accepted on their own respectable merits, although they were actually less original in relation to their time than Wilde had been, ten or fifteen years earlier. But then Wilde could never have become a Court Theatre playwright. He was interested in making plays works of art, though only once did he fully succeed in the task ; and he had no social gospel. Some revival of interest in Wilde was, however, provoked by his *Salome*, which fell under the Lord Chamberlain's ban as a stage play because of its Biblical subject, but was successfully made the libretto of an opera by Richard Strauss.

Altogether, the Censorship question was one of the issues of the day. A Royal Commission was demanded to examine it, largely because of the attacks of Shaw, William Archer and others on the power given to a " Court official " to deprive a playwright of his livelihood at will. Certain works by Ibsen and Maeterlinck had been banned, and this brought all good Europeans into the ranks of the attackers.



By an inverted reasoning, the public began to think that every censored play must be a masterpiece ; and on this assumption a number of dull pieces were inflicted on the members of Sunday evening societies, whose audience by a legal fiction were permitted to see them.

Such was the background of a young man's dramatic interest in his very early twenties, say in the years from 1905 to 1907. And if that should now appear to have been an age of enviable tranquillity, I can only recall it as an age of unrelenting conflict. This was no doubt the effect of intellectual growing-pains ; for looking back I can form a picture of genuine period character and even leisurely charm — the ladies just beginning to find it old-fashioned to ride bicycles in the Park ; their long dresses, both afternoon and evening, that " did up " with hooks and eyes at the back ; the dust on the country roads and the mud in the London streets ; Shaw's first motor-car with the great man himself at the wheel and Mrs. Shaw in a becoming motor-veil at his side ; the races at Epsom and Ascot with King Edward in his grey top-hat smoking a cigar ; H. G. Wells in evening tails with black waistcoat and tie saying a few words to me at a Fabian *conversazione* where dancing was described as " the ethical movement ". After a year or two of this London life, I resigned my post as university lecturer in science to take a private tutorial post with prospects of travel. My own education was to be continued in a post-graduate course at Munich ; and it was this latter prospect that decided the step.

No journey across Europe can ever compare with the first. Still looking eastward from my window as evening

falls, I realize how familiar the life of those now forbidden countries has grown to me in the course of time. It seems yesterday (though it last happened more than two years ago) that one drove to the Channel port and crossed over with the car, and passed in a few hours from the Flemish ploughing horses to the yoked oxen about Compiègne or Laon ; then left the chalky downs of Champagne for the lovely square of Nancy and the mountains of the Vosges and the Rhine, and climbed over the Black Forest into the rolling plains of Württemberg ; and saw the Alps rise in the distance beyond the cathedral of Ulm and the Marienkirche of Munich ; and so by forest and pass gained the ultimate goal of Florence or Siena. There was even a day when I rehearsed all morning at the theatre, and lunched at the Garrick Club, and dined the same evening at Thomas Mann's villa on a Swiss lake, thanks to a plane that crossed France in two hours. And yet this first long journey, in 1907, remains the clearest in my mind. It began by Dover and Ostend, and was broken at Brussels and Cologne, and again at Coblenz to which we took the Rhine steamboat. The month was September, when tourists were coming home to England in the opposite direction ; and on the evening of the third day from London we drew into the main station of the Bavarian city, there to live for a year. To a young European, it seemed a coming-of-age.

## 2

### OLD GERMANY

Munich in 1907 was a sprawling, tippling, good-natured place, provincial notwithstanding its pride as capital of a southern kingdom. Although the student population included many would-be painters, and the great Goyas and Dürers could be seen in the Old Pinakothek, it had not yet given itself the name or the airs of an "art city". From the standpoint of architecture it could never have claimed any such distinction. Many buildings were covered in stucco and decorated in the baroque style, and some of the palaces had been cheaply provided with painted windows instead of real ones. Except for a few carved and groined gateways, the medieval survivals were insignificant : the modern work was uniformly tasteless. The suburbs with their mock-gothic villas had to be seen to be believed.

Whatever character the city possessed was due to the meeting of old winding streets of shops and beerhouses with broad featureless avenues, the latter stretching out fanwise from the Residences and the English Garden. Four-seated open horse-cabs plied everywhere, and often they were

loaded to the depth of their springs with stout students in grey frock-coats and coloured peaked caps, the badges of the various duelling corps. With these young gentlemen it was a point of honour not to walk, even from lecture to lecture in the scattered university buildings; and their journeys from beerhouse to beerhouse were invariably made behind a trotting horse. As their faces were often scarred in the semblance of a proposition of Euclid by the combats they had survived, the vehicles bearing them around the city were known to other students as *pontes asinorum*.

In winter the wheels of the cabs were taken off and replaced by sleigh-runners for months at a time; and then the scrape and rattle of wrought-iron over the cobbles gave way to the tinkle of bells. If in a thaw the snow of the street surface wore thin, men were employed to shovel it on to the roadway from the side walk, which was otherwise seldom cleared. This was one of the tasks of the public serving-men (*Dienstmänner*) who stood at every corner to await burdens or errands. In the hotels and *pensions*, other serving-men with brushes strapped to their feet skated around polishing the floors. These men, and also waiters and shopkeepers, addressed every superior in the third person. All menials took off their caps at the approach of an employer or otherwise saluted him. These survivals of feudalism are worth recalling, for the old-German picture cannot be complete without them. I doubt if there were fifty motor-driven vehicles in the whole of Munich at this time.

The crazy Ludwig, king of Bavaria and patron of Wagner, was already confined in the villa on the Starn-

berger See where eventually he met his death ; but the Regent walked often and unattended in the city, raising his hat when passers-by stood aside to make way for him. The Court was in formal evidence only at the Opera, and then rarely. The truly popular monarch, as always in Bavaria, was the peasant from the highlands, who strode everywhere in the old part of the town with his feathered cap, short jacket and leather breeches. Gold and silver pieces were often sewn into his waistcoat. At the October Fair he could be seen grotesquely bestriding a Lohengrin swan on the roundabouts, or gaping at the fat woman who served as decoy to a tentful of freaks ; and in his bucolic ranks were a few bearded and more earnest-looking fellows from Oberammergau, spending the money they had earned by acting in the Passion Play or betweenwhiles by carving toy chalets and cuckoo-clocks.

Such peasant invasions were seasonal to spring and autumn ; and after Christmas Munich held its own metropolitan carnival, the *Fasching*, celebrated by masked balls in an old vaudeville theatre and pairs of lovers slipping through the starlit streets in early morning. In summer, tourists came to the Wagner Festival in the Prinzregententheater, one of the first in Europe to adopt the modern seating plan of a single sloping tier.

For most of the year popular symphony concerts were held in the beerhouses, where also all political meetings took place. The citizens liked to tell the tale of a Temperance Society compelled to hold its meeting in the Hofbräuhaus. *Singspiele*, consisting of peasant songs with vaudeville, were given on platforms in the bigger halls. One Kathe Kobus

ran a more sophisticated cabaret called *Simplizissimus*, where no public personage, and least of all royalty, could escape ridicule. Always after these late nights, summer and winter alike, many students went to the station to catch the early train to Garmisch and climb the Zugspitze or one of the harder peaks of the Wetterstein range. The life of the mountains was close to the city.

In our *pension* everybody wanted to talk English to young Englishmen, and it was hard to keep to the rule of grammar and exercises by day, and reading and conversation by night, which should enable anybody to master a language in a few weeks. I certainly had no more time to spend on the business, for I have always regarded foreign languages as a kind of necessary shorthand, in which head waiters and diplomats reach the highest proficiency but ordinary folk can meet their civilized requirements if they wish.

The theatre found a place immediately in my system of German education, for the two legitimate playhouses of Munich were just opening with their seasonal variety of plays, from German sentimental comedies to Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Shaw and Gorky. One of them, the Residenztheater, a lovely playhouse which I believe was the first to install a revolving stage, announced that during the season it would present the whole of Ibsen's plays from the first to the last at fortnightly intervals. This promise was fulfilled, and I was duly grateful for having arrived in the city at such a moment. The other, the Schauspielhaus, was a typical German provincial theatre run on the repertory plan, with a stock company and a change of bill every night. The kiosks everywhere carried the playbills in large Gothic

characters, which brought them to everybody's notice. London and New York should have kiosks : they get in the way of pedestrian traffic but they are the best form of theatre announcement.

The Hoftheater or Royal Opera House was flourishing : its tenor at the time was Knote, the German contemporary of Caruso. He was accustomed to sing at Munich from September to May for some modest retainer, and then he took a Covent Garden engagement to make his fortune. This theatre generally sold out all its seats for the week before noon on Monday, so that poor students had to get up early and stand in line with the Dienstmänner from seven in the morning. Their place was generally in the topmost gallery, where they could hear their girl neighbours gushing over the entry of the officers below. It was a tradition that officers should remain standing during a performance, either at the side of the parquet or the back of the boxes ; and in close ranks they made an effective decoration to a full house.

When the Mozart operas were given for a cycle with famous singers, the Residenztheater could be sure of the same success ; but for most of the season it offered a repertory rather like that of the Burgtheater in Vienna, with high comedy and classical drama alternating. Nothing very revolutionary could be shown on this Court stage, and the appearance of Ibsen meant that Germany already considered him a classic. His long personal association with Munich was also remembered. The policy of the Schauspielhaus was much freer. Hauptmann's *The Weavers* could be seen there regularly, with Gorky's *Lower Depths* (A Night Shelter) and Tolstoy's *Power of Darkness* and Maeterlinck's

*Monna Vanna* and Strindberg's *The Father*, Ibsen's *Ghosts* and even Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* — almost the entire list of controversial plays of the period. The works that our Stage Society had presented on experimental Sunday evenings were played here nightly as a matter of course, before a regular and appreciative public. But the Munich playgoer, like others, looked abroad for talent rather than at home. Wedekind, who was then living in the suburb of Schwabing, was never performed, though many of his fantastic dramas were already written. The Austrian dramatists, like Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal, found it much easier to get a hearing. The only censorship was that of the police, which was exercised immediately there was any trouble in the theatre, such as interruption of a play. I remember such a *Theaterskandal* arising from the production of Machiavelli's comedy *Mandragola*, which thirty years later I put on in London without causing one protest.

These Munich theatres may have been subsidized indirectly, but they were quite commercial in their study of public taste, and they never gave more performances of a play than the audiences were willing to pay for. A new work was given three or four times in the week after its production (usually made on a Saturday evening for the convenience of the Press). If it proved a box-office draw it was played twice weekly for several weeks or even months : if not, it was played once a fortnight for a short time and then was dropped altogether. Some plays went on year after year in the repertory, and might reach 100 performances. Production costs were trifling, for old scenery was repainted and the company were working and earning their



living during the rehearsal period. But if there was no material risk in presenting a play, there was a risk of reputation. No director wanted to have failures, even in repertory where they could easily be concealed. Nor did he want to call upon his season-ticket holders, classes B and C, to fill the house at cut prices. When classes B and C made their appearance, Class A, entitled to the new plays, ceased to come at all. Success, in fact, was as all-important in repertory as in any other kind of theatre, and all eyes brightened at the word *Riesenerfolg* (or smash hit).

Munich then had about half a million inhabitants. If one in twenty went now and then to the opera or the play, and one in fifty went every week, the three theatres could be sure of good houses. The real proportions were perhaps higher, for in that age before the competition of the screen all habits were more settled. The whole middle class could be relied on to support the stage. From their frequent bowings to each other as they circulated in disciplined streams around the foyers in the intervals, it could be seen that the audience were well acquainted. Drab and dowdy as they were, the drama was part of their culture which in turn was part of their class-consciousness. Last night's play would be discussed by small officials in their bureaucratic round, and by professional men visiting or being visited by patients, and even by shopkeepers talking with customers. No peoples' theatres had yet been founded, and probably it never occurred to any workman to go to the Schauspielhaus or the Residenz. Poor students attended in numbers, but that was another matter. The legitimate stage was a middle-class institution, and its very creditable liberty of thought,

fostered by dramatists like Ibsen, was a middle-class liberty not yet translated into a basic political creed. Priests were often to be seen at the play, especially at the Sunday afternoon performances when the day's Masses were over ; and the public in general must have been pretty well divided between the devout and the liberal (for political liberalism always implied some sort of protestantism or free-thinking). But the one thing that united them was membership of what is called the *bourgeoisie*.

This is no doubt clearer to me to-day than it could ever have been at the time, for a young foreigner finds nothing harder to grasp than the social distinctions (or lack of them) in the country where he happens to be. To an Englishman the absence of what is technically called a lady was noticeable in Munich, and I confess sometimes welcome. Such beings must have existed in Prussia and Saxony, and even in their most formidable shape ; but in Bavaria all women seemed to be women and amiable at that. A Cambridge scientist who was in Munich with a vivisection permit, making experiments on mice, told me that German women had one passion, the cream bun ; but this was a falsehood of specialist observation. They certainly liked cream buns, as Nora in *A Doll's House* liked macaroons ; but above all they enjoyed being approached as human beings, neither housewives nor bluestockings. The girl from the suburbs who came for a day's walk in the mountains remained almost indistinguishable in her manners, her reserve or abandonment or charm, from the young professor's wife presiding at a tea-table.

If these social observations are allowed, a word can be said about the racial question too. In all that time I was in

Germany I cannot remember any feeling against Jews, either in the theatre where many of them were working or in ordinary life. There may have been some such prejudice among the student or official classes, but a looker-on would never have noticed it. Only in the years after 1919 did mutterings begin to the effect that the Jews had undermined German culture. And since the Nazis have attributed "culture-bolshevism" in Germany to the Weimar Republic, I would add that this "culture-bolshevism", meaning liberalism in thought and art, flourished before 1914 under Wilhelm II and was then much commoner than at any time in the 1920's.

My day's work in the university began at seven in the morning by attendance at an hour's lecture on the physics of the sun, and continued in the forenoon with some laboratory work on physico-chemical subjects. But with no examinations to pass, there was no need to take all this too seriously; and in fact discoveries in the field of radio-activity had made theories obsolete which had been the foundation of my knowledge as schoolboy, student and graduate. The movement of knowledge seemed suddenly to have taken the increasing *tempo* of the world which was manifesting itself in the internal combustion engine and the beginnings of flight. Or was this partly the fancy of a young man turning from exact knowledge to drama?

I made friends in the university with liberal students, outside the duelling Corps, who were glad to talk with an Englishman of these things; and these companions tended to be students of literature rather than my fellows from the research laboratories. Our conversations often took the

form of one hour's English exchanged for one hour's German. I had brought a silk hat and tail suit with me from England, and this made me an embarrassing number of new friends, for every student needed such an outfit in which to pay his formal call on his professors once a term. Borrowing was the rule ; and sometimes the student returning my clothes was accompanied by another known to him but not to me, who bowed stiffly on my threshold and asked if he might have the honour of wearing them next.

The afternoons were spent in walking or riding, horseback or bicycle, with such student acquaintances ; and on Sundays we joined in scrambles on the Bavarian peaks, where the rock was friable and treacherous compared with the basalt of the Lakes or North Wales which I already knew. We carried coils of rope which were seldom used : at the summit there was generally a comfortable inn crowded with walkers who had come up by the path and were toasting the beauties of the view in beer or red Tiroler wine. On such days one returned too late for the theatre ; but most of my other evenings were spent there, always with a student card at minimum price. By this time I knew the personalities of all the players, and even of the prompter who read each part aloud, sometimes too audibly, from his hooded box in the middle of the footlights. It was perhaps too much to expect of any company that they should keep the text of as many as ten plays in their heads at the same time. But to remember words was easier than to preserve distinctions of character : type-playing showed itself as the real weakness of the repertory system. Some of the heavy fathers, elderly spinsters and young lovers soon appeared

rather in the manner of a stage procession, whose individual members had gone off and were coming on again with old familiar faces.

It was the director's task to give variety and freshness to plays under these casting conditions. The total repertory required two or three of these *Regisseure* beside the general director responsible for all productions ; and there was always an evening director (*Abendregisseur*) who timed and scrutinized every act and scene, and had powers to call an extra rehearsal any morning. Directors of separate plays had a free hand, and some of them showed an individual imagination that went far beyond the most skilful of stage management. I began to know one director by his lighting, another by his variation of stage levels ; and to see possibilities in the art of staging plays which our English theatre, in spite of Craig's writings, had not begun to realize. With all this in mind, I sought to make back-stage contacts which would help me to understand the technical aspect of theatre. My first ambition was to write plays ; but I wanted to work myself into theatre life, to attend rehearsals, and to learn how everything was done. This was far from easy, for a German theatre playing repertory had no time to spare for a young English scientist with a dramatic hobby. As for other students, they laughed at me and advised making love to an actress ; adding that after a week of her I should find a waitress more fun. There was something in this, for when I met stage folk I found them personally disappointing. I remember that one of the directors envied me the life of science, and said that whenever he entered a stage door he felt he should put on the white overalls of a specialist, because

the artist was a pathological case.

At about this time Shaw's *Candida* was announced by the Schauspielhaus, and on going to the first night I found that the director, misreading a stage direction which describes the poet Marchbanks as having apparently slept in the heather, had dressed him as a sportsman who only needed a rifle to be in perfect trim for deer-stalking. Otherwise the play had been understood well enough. I wrote to Shaw to give an account of this production, and received by return mail one of those lively postcards which all who know him, and others too, have accumulated in the course of years. This message from the *Dichter* was a sufficient passport to the authorities of the theatre, I was invited to rehearsals of all foreign plays, and at the director's suggestion I was emboldened to write two articles on English and Irish drama for the *Neueste Nachrichten*, where they duly appeared. So it happened that my first earnings as a writer were for work in a language not my own. A student of philosophy had looked over the script for me ; and sharing the fifty marks which arrived at my Munich address by money order, we had a convivial evening at a wine shop, for as he said philosophically, that is always better for men of letters than a beerhouse. On the way home I was obliged to stop and tell him how strongly the *Dichter* Shaw would have disapproved our entire proceeding, had he known of it ; but he sawed the air with vague gestures and imaginary further toasts to *die schöne Philosophie*. During the evening we had become sworn brothers in the student fashion. Physicists and mathematicians now began to ask me why I was no longer attending their lectures, but writing for the papers

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

instead. I snatched a fortnight's holiday in Vienna and Budapest, going third class by night train, to think about this question of science and art.

At the Burgtheater in Vienna I was able to see German classics played with gestures in proportion to the immensity of the stage. Those were the great days of the Burg, when even the ushers, dignified grey-haired men, wore gold braid on their uniforms and carried cocked hats which got in the way of their selling of programmes. The vast Imperial box faced the stage from the middle of the first balcony, and one evening I saw it occupied by Franz-Joseph. I could now appreciate the life of Vienna, its cafés where all the business of the city was done, the Prater and the vineyards of the Wienerwald, the Zentralcafé with its chess-players and their lookers-on, and the old town within the Ring. This was before the time of the Theater in der Josefstadt, and I recall nothing on the stage that was half as exciting as the Breughels and the Danube. Maybe, at twenty-three, the poise of life was helping to balance the authority of science and the attraction of art. At Budapest, without understanding a word, I could follow the performance both of classics and some modern plays in the style since perfected by Molnar. A strong and colourful theatricality marked everything on the Hungarian stage, from the State Theatre to the gipsy cabarets ; but in this capital too the drama of living for me was uppermost.

When I came back to Munich the city seemed more provincial than ever. I took a dislike, quite unreasonably, to the youths and maidens munching ham rolls in the long interval at the Schauspielhaus, and the endless procession of

their dull elders circulating in the corridor around the hat-and-cloak rooms, the compulsory financial pillar of the German stage. I knew how important an institution this theatre was to the young life of Germany, as it had been to me ; but nothing less than the stage of Berlin, where plays had long runs and Reinhardt was in command at the Deutsches Theater, would have contented me. I had to escape from science and Bavaria together. At the worst, I knew that an English honours graduation followed by a German post-graduate course could always earn me a living in a university college at home ; and meanwhile the world was giving me a free chance as writer and theatre man.

An opportunity arose of going to Zurich for a further stay in Europe, and I accepted it at once. The change of university solved the scientific problem forthwith, and new surroundings promised greater freedom of every kind. Perhaps the Alps of Switzerland were higher too ; it was certain that the Zugspitze was dwindling. This was the summer of 1908 ; and had I known it, I was saying farewell to Old Germany and everything it meant. Leaning from the window as the train started, I exchanged the familiar *Du* with fellow-students, and then blew a kiss to a Munich girl I had never set eyes on before. When we were safely moving out, she returned it gaily. An hour or two later we drew up on a pier by Lake Constance, and embarked on a steam-boat which lost the German shore to view before sighting the Swiss lowlands with their jagged background. Yes, the Alps were higher ; and the next great lake with the city at its outflow looked very much as the posters of Continental travel had always pictured it.



## 3

## ZURICH—LONDON

If Munich had been both Bavarian-national and provincial, Zurich was just a city on a lake in a country international at heart for all its William Tell romanticism. Russians, Poles, Netherlands, Scandinavians, Italians, Frenchmen and even a few English were represented in this cluster, and swarmed on terms of complete understanding with the angular black-coated German-Swiss. Having common interests in learning or science, sport on the water or the mountains, the pursuit of health or the refuge from persecution, we went about our daily task in that freedom which small European communities in this last century (or shall we say until the present one) have been able to offer their guests. The general tolerance was accompanied by a rigid system of police registration, which was accepted as a needful precaution in a country where all were welcome.

The social atmosphere was as congenial as the simplicity and cleanliness — the only dirt in Switzerland is to be found on its glaciers — but living there, I felt from the first the sense of being outside Europe looking in at her life, her

mind and heart, her strength and errors and confusions. As one had hitherto looked into a dramatist's mind through the proscenium of a theatre, observing his particular way of bringing order out of chaos, so one now looked out physically at the strange and gigantic spectacle of the Powers. It was the time of the Edwardian *Entente Cordiale* linking up with the Franco-Russian alliance, and of the other grouping that professedly joined Germany with Italy through Austria-Hungary as relic of the Holy Roman Empire. But the view one had of it was not political, though all of us knew in those years that Europe might be pregnant with disaster. The individual civilizations themselves were seen more clearly from this craggy international height. Their colours stood out more vividly, with their vast cultural creations; and the very narrowness of the Swiss horizon, mental as well as material, brought a consciousness of the fateful spaces that lay between the Atlantic seaboard and the steppes.

Twice, in those early autumn months in Switzerland, I had taken my student ticket for a journey to the highest point of the railroad before the entry into the tunnel, and walked over the passes into Italy, turning back each time from the first villages above the Lombard plain, and returning to Zurich. Walking the passes is an old Alpine diversion, well repaid in the case of the Saint Gothard or Saint Bernard by the sudden change from mists to sunshine, often in the space of a few yards, and the prospect of the great country below. It was made doubly exciting by a scramble up some not too difficult peak at the head of the pass, from which one might see as far as Milan. After a joyous winding descent

into an upper Italian valley with its vineyards ripening to harvest, to turn back from the gate of this promised land was more than tantalizing. Already I carried in my knapsack the books of those who knew it well — the travels of Arthur Young, the letters of Horace Walpole and Stendhal, the memoirs of Casanova. And if these should appear in every sense a promiscuous bag, they yet reflected the moods of a young Englishman, truant from science, who was learning about Europe and art from men who had taken coach or horse over the same highway. The nearness of Italy, lying there in the sun beyond the snowy ranges seen from the Zurich foothills, made one sure of her in the end ; and for the present she could wait as she had waited for centuries.

France, lying westward and unknown but for one week's visit to Paris when I was hardly out of school, seemed actually much closer because my approach to literature had been chiefly through the French. Stendhal (*De l'Amour, Le Rouge et le Noir, Vie de Henri Brulard*) was then my ruling passion, since I had discovered one of his books on a stall in Vienna ; and if he remains a passion after thirty years, it is because his absorption in life, women, war, theatre and poetry falls into a sequence personal and familiar. I could imagine him, as he somewhere describes himself, seated in the 1930's on a bench by an Italian lake looking back on it all : tracing with his cane in the dust the initials of the mistresses who had brought him so much grief as well as joy : recalling proudly that in his writings he had never given one of them away : declaring the ultimate creed of a man born into the crucible of the French Revolution and

destined to survive into the Victorian age. He had been among the most eager of Napoleon's soldiers, following him to the Danube and to Moscow ; yet he stood unmoved by the Fall in 1814 because it had ceased to mark the overthrow of human aspiration. If he had forgotten the plots of a score of his unwritten comedies, he preserved the spirit of our civilized heritage. Stendhalism is like Byronism, it has its manifest extravagances. But is there any man of a century ago who stands closer to our own time ?

My reading just then included works of genius of every nationality, in which the *Pensées* of Pascal, the comedies of Molière, the novels of Flaubert and even the contemporary histories of Anatole France were confoundedly mixed up with Tolstoy and Dostoievsky and Turgenev. Still more oddly, the first part of Goethe's *Faust* which I knew almost by heart was accompanied as chorus by the verse of Stefan Georg. Then, having begun to realize how far dramatic poetry differs from all other, I was in course of discovering the marvels of the dramatists before and after Shakespeare. When it came to other poetry, I liked Ronsard and Donne better than Keats or Shelley. If there was room in any reader's mind for *The Anatomy of Melancholy* beside *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, I somehow contrived to find it. No wonder there was little place in this gallery for Thackeray or Dickens ; or that George Meredith, a writer who had been in fashion with every young Englishman of the period, was as good as forgotten. Bergson brought some discipline of thought into all this luxuriant confusion, and Sorel's *Réflexions sur la Violence* suggested new and disturbing political concepts far removed from those of Wells or the

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

Fabians. By no means lastly, but outstandingly, there was Nietzsche ; and I confess that for a while *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Birth of Tragedy*, both read in the lyrical German, were like an Old and New Testament.

Nothing could witness my abandonment of science better than this miscellaneous yielding to mental avidity, sensibility, defiance, eroticism and literary conceit. The drama of my own private stage ousted all actual theatre interest for a while ; and it was certainly more exciting than anything I could hope to see in the town theatre of Zurich, whose notion of modernity was to play some Russian social drama by Tolstoy or Gorky four times a week. (The work of Chekhov was still unknown.) I learnt nothing new about the stage or contemporary drama during many months spent in the German-Swiss city ; but on the strength of my published articles the university allowed me to give short extension lectures to evening students on English life and letters. The subjects ranged from Elizabethan tragedy to the woman suffrage movement ; the language was German but Socratic conversations followed in French and English ; and since I learnt as much as my listeners the hours were far from wasted. They helped me to gather up and formulate the results of much seeing, thinking and reading ; and this was useful now that the time drew nearer for a return to England.

By the middle of a second summer I was back in London, wondering why the place had changed so little when I had changed so much, or thought so. A. R. Orage's weekly review *The New Age*, which I had read before and during my time abroad, was still appearing with shrewd notes of

the week, articles by Shaw, Belloc and Chesterton, a weekly book article by Arnold Bennett under a pseudonym, and commentaries on the arts. After a short spell in a teaching post I became its dramatic critic, with freedom to train the batteries of Continental criticism on Somerset Maugham, three of whose comedies were running at one time, Galsworthy who had just produced a capital-and-labour play called *Strife*, and Barrie who had established himself with *What Every Woman Knows*. The Vedrenne-Barker management was no more, and no regular forward-looking theatre had yet taken its place. Acting, too, seemed to be undecided. Ellen Terry survived from the former great generation, and even appeared in Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. "Mrs. Pat" was to be seen occasionally, and Marie Tempest and Irene Vanbrugh moulded their art sensitively to whatever slight changes English comedy might undergo with the passage of years. But there were no new Irvings or Hares or Wyndhams that the public could discover; and though nearly every actor of the Vedrenne-Barker school made a name for himself, it was generally in character work. Gordon Craig's productions and especially his writings were much discussed, but Granville Barker remained the only practising director of distinction. It was as though the stage had halted, sensing the approaching rivalry of the screen; and in fact at this time (1909) Charles Chaplin was touring England with Fred Karno's *Mumming Birds*, which I recall seeing on "the halls", as we called the vaudeville houses.

To a young European the round of new plays was dull enough. For a while Rupert Brooke, who wanted to learn

about the stage, came with me to the openings ; but the only luck we had together was with *Don* at the Haymarket, written by Rudolf Besier who was later to write *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. After these excursions we would either go round to the Gray's Inn rooms of Edward Marsh (then Winston Churchill's secretary) or rail at the theatre together in the Café Royal. Brooke then went abroad ; and presently Orage, who was always a good editor, suggested that instead of gnashing my teeth weekly over plays that his readers would never go to see, I should write about the Continental stage and its dramatists. This suited me perfectly, and the series began with the Scandinavians and went on with Germans, Austrians, Frenchmen, Russians, Dutchmen and Italians, with Shaw, Barker and Galsworthy as the three Court Theatre playwrights planted in the midst of them. These essays were later published in England and America under the title *Modern Dramatists*, which was far too important for their content, but conveyed a journalistic idea well enough.

In the same months I wrote a comedy, *Civil War*, which was produced by the Stage Society at the Aldwych Theatre in the spring of 1910. My twenty-fifth birthday fell during the rehearsals, and the first performance took place under the shadow of public mourning for Edward VII. The plot concerned a land-owning baronet whose son had fallen in love with a daughter of an old international communist living in a colony near the baronet's estate. The drama of social and political oppositions was as simple-minded as this theme would suggest ; but at twenty-five it is one thing to be critical and another to be genuinely creative. Consider-

ing how few first plays are ever performed, this one was lucky and perhaps pardonable. Thanks to the acting it had a respectable Press, and one or two repertory theatres revived it in the next two years, after which it died a natural and far from regrettable death.

The event of that year 1910 was the Frohman Repertory Season at the Duke of York's. Charles Frohman, the shrewdest of theatre men, had been impressed by the success of Shaw and the other dramatists of the Court Theatre, and decided to give them a real chance under Granville Barker's direction. The theatre chosen was in good standing with the public, but it had drawbacks for repertory which no one seemed to realize until after the opening. These might have been overcome if only one of the first three or four plays had drawn the town, and carried the rest of the bill by frequent performance. But neither Galsworthy's *Justice* nor Barker's *The Madras House*, still less Shaw's *Misalliance*, could do this; and Barrie's plays, which were more popular, formed a double bill. The success problem confronted the repertory management as grimly as any other, and after a few weeks Pinero's old play *Trelawney of the Wells* was brought in to save the situation. By the time the venture closed, it had lost Frohman a small fortune and the newer English dramatists a good deal of credit. The drama of intellectualism and argument had been routed, and on the whole deservedly. Shaw remained, as he had been in the Court Theatre days, the only one of these writers entitled to demand of the theatre that it should be his own mouth-piece; and this by right of being a wit and a dramatist born. The rest, with their social indignation or carping, were



misusing the stage and frustrating the actor and boring the audience.

I remember many things about the year 1911, including my own retirement to a cottage to write comedies, a move that coincided with a heat wave, a railroad strike, and an international crisis which threatened to blow up the world just three years too soon. My cellar-book also links this year with the framework of later life, for it was an excellent year for burgundy. In our theatre the interest of the year began early and well, for on January 30th the Reinhardt Company opened at the London Coliseum. I was there that day, and would not have been absent for the world from such an occasion. Having seen the first performance in the afternoon I saw the second in the evening, and the third next afternoon, and so on while funds and opportunity lasted. The play, if one could call it such, was an Arabian Nights entertainment founded upon the story of Nouredin and the Fair Persian : the title was *Sumurun*, Victor Holländer wrote the music and there was no text other than the sequence of action (one could not call it a libretto) devised by Friedrich Freska. There were several acting or miming performances in the first rank : one, obviously supreme, was that of Ernst Matray in the part of the clown. Direction was evident in every movement in every scene ; and this was the work of Reinhardt, whose theatrical *flair*, to put it at the lowest, had contrived to make a masterpiece of its kind out of an old highly-coloured tale and a good company of mimes and some near-Eastern music. By what strange accident or providence *Sumurun* reached the stage of a London family vaudeville theatre, nobody could explain.

It was there for several weeks and months ; and one could only rejoice in it. This wordless play had taken full revenge upon the too-wordy dramatists of the Frohman season ; but most of all upon their assumption that the stage must be their personal pulpit.

Later in the same year came the inferior but even more successful production of *The Miracle*, a spectacle devised by Karl Vollmöller to the music of Humperdinck and given at Olympia under Reinhardt's direction. This was *kolossal* where the Coliseum show had been merely superb. Both productions, very likely, had been conceived with the idea of making as much money as possible out of the English public, so that it could be spent on further Reinhardt ventures in Berlin. In this they succeeded, and for years afterwards the Professor (as he had now become) had complete freedom to develop the work of his companies. To *The Miracle* also he owed the castle of Leopoldskron, near Salzburg, built by a prince-archbishop of the seventeenth century who had banished all actors from the diocese. We shall come later to the Leopoldskron evenings which gave brilliance to the Festival in the 1920's.

1911 was also the year of Chekhov's first performance in London, and as usual the dramatic pioneer was the Stage Society, which gave *The Cherry Orchard* in George Calderon's translation. An audience of would-be intellectuals tittered at intervals all through the play, and had to be told by some members, including myself, to mend their manners. Next day our leading critic, William Archer, admitted with his invariable honesty that he had found the dramatist completely incomprehensible. Shaw, character-

istically, entered the discussion by explaining Chekhov in purely scientific and social terms ; the man, he said, was merely showing how futile the life of the *bourgeoisie* could be. He even threatened to write a Chekhov play himself, and later did so, to his own satisfaction, in *Heartbreak House*. These perplexities and obscurations were due to the simple fact that *The Cherry Orchard* was a work of art. It had nothing to do with the drama in which Shaw and Archer had been mainly interested, the social drama of Ibsen and his followers. Chekhov was employing naturalism as an art form in the theatre, just as Flaubert and George Moore in successive generations had employed it in their novels. Those who had understood the post-impressionism (or art naturalism) of Manet or Renoir or Cézanne should have had no difficulty in knowing what Chekhov was about. In the following year or two *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* were seen, and they made clearer the dramatist's individual line and the beauty of composition that he had brought into the lifelike theatre.

Next in 1911 came the Imperial Russian Ballet, which had already triumphed in Paris. Its first appearance at Covent Garden on June 21st, the day of the summer solstice, with Nijinsky and Karsavina, was of course the event of the century so far. Diaghilev was in command, but this was still his romantic period with *Pavillon d'Armide*, *Spectre de la Rose*, *Cléopatra* and *Les Sylphides*. I shall inevitably have more to say about ballet, without pretending to any knowledge of its technique ; but the importance of this coming of the Russians lay in its great widening of the theatre horizon. Here, in complete harmony, were direction, scene and

costume, music and the work of stage artists who in years of schooling and longer years of experience had perfected themselves. Each one of them spent more hours in daily practice than our players of the legitimate stage spent in acting. It was possible to speak of the art of the theatre, not only as a unity which Gordon Craig had sought to make his readers comprehend, but as an accomplished fact. And here, at the end of a memorable year, is the place to pause again and look around.

## 4

## PEACE BEFORE WAR

**I**n his autobiography *La Vie de Henri Brulard*, having concluded two long chapters about his life, Stendhal writes "After so many general observations, I shall now get born". I have much the same feeling in approaching the year 1912, when actually I reached the age of twenty-seven. *Après tant de considérations générales, je vais naître*. Up to now I have seen a little of the stage and the world, enough to make a prologue to my own comedy or tragedy or whatever it is destined to be ; I can estimate the parts so far played by thought and action in the shaping of a mind. Now must come the rise of the curtain and the "act of preparation", as the French call it, in which the drama really begins. I have started a career ; but do I really want the things that success in a career brings with it, money and reputation, settlement and responsibility, all the many millstones that our century can hang about the neck of artists and writers ? This may be begging the question : such burdens are very welcome if one is able to bear them. In this year 1912 I see older writers whom I know personally, men like Arnold

Bennett, struggling with them all the same. I think again of the gaunt ill-dressed figure of Synge, standing in 1907 on the stage of the Great Queen Street Theatre on the London first night of *The Playboy* and facing the Irish hooligans with the unseeing eyes of a dreamer. It is true he was then a man about to die of a mortal sickness ; but what more could he have asked of life than to have written this comedy, and lived among the Aran islanders and the folk of Kerry, and sat staring before him in some Paris café while a waiter brought his single unheeded drink ? In a life like that, pauses and silences count for most and bring their own reward. They count for most in every act of preparation, when the outward progress of the drama is so slow as to be imperceptible.

One thing I see now which I could never then have foreseen — that is how lucky we were, we men now in the fifties, to have known what the world was like before 1914. Seeing what has since befallen and was then in course of preparing, we need not talk of “that civilization” but simply “what the world was like”. It had many worthwhile things to offer the grown man or woman ; and by grown I mean mature, ready at some age in the twenties to face outward catastrophe if need be. The unlucky ones are the men now in the thirties and forties, who were born into one cataclysm of our social life and now must face another without real experience of the first. They are the legion of the frustrated, and from no fault of their own. Beside them, though they are half a generation our juniors, we can be young and confident. And here let me be forgiven the egoism of standing, in 1912, waiting to be born. The

earliest recollection of Stendhal's infancy was biting his nurse's cheek when she asked him too sentimentally for a kiss. Mine is that of casting off socialism and the Fabians and the *New Age*, always with due gratitude for past favours, and beginning a new hedonist life on the editorial staff of *Vanity Fair*, which Frank Harris had made a man's paper thriving, as always, on its Spy cartoons of notabilities. Also I was writing dramatic criticisms for the *Star* and short essays called "turnovers" for the *Globe*. Royalties came in from translations such as Sudermann's *Midsummer Fires* which I did for Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester. I was planning a book on Molière's characters, in which one should get acquainted with Alceste and Célimène as people of our century, instead of thinking of them as figures in the classics. Two or three unacted plays lying in my own desk did not seem to matter : a time for them would surely come along.

I moved from a Bloomsbury attic into a top floor in Mortimer Street, near Oxford Circus ; and presently T. E. Hulme, a writer on philosophy and translator of Bergson, came to share it with me. Our link at first was that we had been on the staff of *The New Age* together ; but soon we found much more in common. Hulme made a strong impression on his time, though his writings actually were to be few (he was killed in 1917 on the Belgian coast, quite near my own Company headquarters). A book about him by Michael Roberts (1938) deals with his attitude to the world. Tall and rather Prussian-looking, with greying fair hair and blue eyes, he would sit for hours unwinding, as it were, general ideas, with expansive gestures which began

and ended in the region of his chest. He seldom went to bed before three or got up before noon ; but his reading was done in the morning hours. On all evenings when I was not at the theatre, we dined in a chop-house behind the Café Royal with the sculptors Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska and a group of English painters including Nevinson and Robert Bevan ; and also sometimes Richard Curle, Conrad's friend and biographer, and Ramiro de Maeztu, who became Spanish ambassador to the Argentine. The rest of the evening was spent in the Café itself, generally in talking about the world, the inevitability of war, Marinetti's futurism or Ezra Pound's verse, or the paper that Wyndham Lewis was bringing out called *Blast*. Once a week these conversations were carried on more fully in a house in Frith Street, where Middleton Murry and C. R. V. Nevinson used to join us. We knew of the work of T. S. Eliot, though he never came himself to these gatherings.

The atmosphere of this group was authoritarian, and no doubt Hulme, had he lived, would have embraced some form of fascism. The significance of all our argument lay in its anticipation, by about ten years, of any political movement embodying its ideas. There was nothing, actually, about which we were united : the sharpest divisions were on religion as a motive in art and literature. Hulme himself declared that he was a member of the Church of England and left it at that. Again I cannot remember any anti-semitic feeling. Jacob Epstein, who was in the midst of his "abstract" period as sculptor, does not recall it either. Our general interest in "abstract" art led us especially to a revaluation of the images of poetry and a strong reaction



against romantic verse. This movement would certainly have extended to drama, had any members of the group been able to take the theatre seriously, even the intellectual theatre. But Shaw, I regret to say, was not even discussed as a thinker. As a rationalist, he had shown his opposition to the "heroic values" forming the central nerve of our essential ethic. "The author of *Arms and the Man*", wrote Hulme, "reminds one of the wasps described by Fabre, who sting their prey in the central ganglia in order to paralyse it, in this way acting as though they were expert entomologists, though in reality they can have no conscious knowledge of what they are doing."

I have to give this short account of intellectual birth-pangs in 1912-13, although my total picture is incomplete because it leaves out the emotional stresses of the same time. I was living among new people in a new eager world, which, however, had few points of contact with the theatre and the writing for and about it which was my living. The contacts which did exist were personal, and through them I drew closer to friends on the stage, most of them working for serious theatre through repertory or some such endeavour in London or the provinces. The London stage was noteworthy only for the productions of Granville Barker, but these included Arnold Bennett's *Great Adventure* at the Kingsway, Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* at the St. James's, and especially a *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Savoy, in which by the aid of an apron stage peopled with "bronze angels" the play was given moments of new and extraordinary loveliness. The leaven of creative direction was already working upon our theatres; and England, which

had seemed to me rather dull and reactionary when I came from abroad, was again the home and hearth of everything I cared for. Visits to Paris in these years made me familiar with the boulevardian theatres, their witty playwrights and smooth players : I took to chess among the professionals in the Café de la Régence, and pursued my Molière studies at the Française. In the Alps I walked more passes.

Late in 1913 the Stage Society asked me to translate two plays by Anatole France, one of which was the *Comedy of the Man who Married a Dumb Wife*. This title sounded familiar, and taking down my Rabelais I found the whole tale in *Pantagruel*, where it is recorded as the subject of a medieval farce played at Montpellier. Anatole France's only embroidery of the plot was to make the husband a much-bribed judge ; and probably he did not think it necessary to give the origin, except implicitly in a dedication to a French society for Rabelaisian research. The comedy has a perfect *peripety* or dramatic reversal of action, for the dumb wife whose tongue is loosened by the surgeon talks too much, and since she cannot be made dumb again, the only remedy is to make her husband deaf. In two acts, it is a classical hour's entertainment if the players can keep up the sublime spirit of mock-solemnity.

The Stage Society production was made at the Haymarket early in 1914, with the dumb wife played by Maire O'Neill, the original Pegeen Mike of Synge's *Playboy*. At the dress rehearsal I found Granville Barker at the back of the circle enjoying the play, and he said at once that he would like to acquire it for Lillah McCarthy. The two performances went well, but the derivation from Rabelais

passed unnoticed by all the critics, including the Francophile and learned A. B. Walkley of *The Times*. Had I known it, this was to be my last direct contact with the stage for at least six years : it was also eventually to be the means by which I met and married a wife, herself by no means dumb. The fact that the comedy was played at the Haymarket completed the chain of association, for there my *Man with a Load of Mischief* was to be produced eleven years later for its first London run. Whatever other parts are played in the theatre, luck admittedly plays the lead. It is so important that in Middle Europe the actual wishing of luck is thought unlucky, and an actor or playwright is wished *Hals-und-Beinbruch* instead. This means "broken neck and legs to you", and it serves just as well. It is contracted to *H. und B.B.* in German telegrams to players wishing them a good first night.

And so we came to the summer of 1914, which perhaps in recollection seems more charged with fate than it seemed at the time. I went to the Derby with Hulme, who had never seen a racecourse before and was fascinated by the mathematical adroitness of the bookmakers in adjusting the changing odds. We stood on the Hill opposite the grandstand, and it gave him equal satisfaction to see the King (George this time and not Edward) flanked by the entire peerage and many members of the House of Commons, all in the ceremonial attire of Epsom. But he reminded me that the Shah of Persia on a visit to this country a few years earlier had declined to see the Derby, saying "It is already known to me that one horse is swifter than another".

The booths on the Downs were pulled up and the round-

abouts cleared away, and England was never quite the same again — but then England never is. Hulme was to be wounded within a year and killed within three: I was to be a soldier nearly five years and go back with an army of occupation to the Germany where he and I had both studied. Our period of training brought us together again, with others including Rupert Brooke who had returned from the expedition to Antwerp. The theatre had stopped at first and then reopened with spy plays and *revues*, the usual provender of war. A distinguished exception under Granville Barker was the *Kingsway*, which gave Thomas Hardy's epic drama *The Dynasts*. In this first autumn, too, eight of Shakespeare's plays were performed at the Old Vic, where Matheson Lang inaugurated the season. Twenty-five of the plays in the First Folio were to be given in this theatre before the Armistice. Even Reinhardt in Berlin could not do so well as this. The Stage Society wisely continued its work, and I made them do *The Recruiting Officer* by Farquhar early in 1915. This was the first Restoration comedy to be revived for many years, and it led to the performance of plays by Congreve during the war, and afterwards to the formation of the Phoenix as a producing unit.

And now it is time to write a few words about war as an interlude in life and a pause on this journey. It is the simpler to do so because this chapter I am writing has been half a dozen times interrupted by air raid warnings, and one of them is in progress as I write this sentence in a room of my own theatre. (As the sentence ends the all-clear is sounded, and the theatre cat comes to rub himself against my legs and tell me of his heroism.) These thunderous echoes in 1940

recall very clearly the sequence from 1914 onwards. I held every rank, except that of sergeant, from private soldier to major and company commander. From early in 1916 until the Armistice, I took part as a combatant in every action of importance on the Western Front from St. Quentin northward. No injury ever took me further back than an advanced dressing station. As an officer I was mounted and grew very fond of my horse, a red roan who behind the lines would go for walks with me like a dog. I still carried Pascal, Stendhal, Casanova and the rest in my valise. At no time had I any impulse to write about the experiences of war, nor do I wish to do so now. The descriptions I have read in the pages of novels appear to me to have as much value as a clinical account, say, of agonies on a deathbed ; and certainly no more. Since Tolstoy's *War and Peace* there has been nothing essentially to be said on this subject. One illuminating experience of war is long association and comradeship with men one might never otherwise have known.

But I am glad to have seen the major assaults on the Somme and the first lumbering entry of tanks into warfare ; the turning of the dolphins in the phosphorescent waters of the North Sea at the mouth of the Yser, where my gun position *Extrême-Gauche* lay among the sandhills ; the tower of Ypres Cloth Hall before it was finally overthrown ; the blowing of the great mines at Messines ; the streaming of the Cavalry Corps at dawn through the broken Hindenburg Line, even though they came back the same evening ; and the Very lights that went up in a desolate landscape, but without the chatter of machine-guns, to serve as fireworks after dusk on Armistice Day. I am critical of heroic values ;

but in their grim precision these remain and I would not have missed them. Nor is their memory weakened by any repetition of war's alarms. The loss of friends apart, the one personal event was my marriage in the spring of 1918 when it seemed the thing might last for ever (I mean of course the war).

In mid-November 1918 my division began the march to the Rhine, a journey of some 200 miles which I made on foot, my horse being needed for laggards at the rear of the column. The French villages in the freed zone were garlanded and festooned to greet us : in the first of our billets for the night we had to liberate a cow which the farmer had driven upstairs to save her from being driven off by the retreating Germans. Cows can get upstairs but not down and the engineers had to lift her through the window-opening with a crane. In Belgium we would invite the burgomaster to dine in the mess, toasting the kings Albert and George in whisky : he would then tell us where to find wild boar of the Ardennes, which we hunted with service rifles if the conditions admitted a day's halt. I had a day's pike-fishing in the Meuse. Presently we crossed the German frontier marked by great stones on a bleak plateau ; and there the divisional general stood under the flag to take the salute. The Eifel, a high wooded part of the Rhineland through which we marched for days, has a Catholic population and peasant houses like those of Bavaria. We passed more and more abandoned German equipment and cars ; and from the opposite direction came, in groups or singly, ragged bearded men, hardly recognizable as British prisoners now freed and making their way to Channel ports.

So there was Germany again, strangely revisited after ten years ; and in the clean houses with their wood-burning tiled stoves one spoke with the sullen but correct local authorities, distributing so many troops to each farm or cottage and reserving the castle on a rocky eminence as personal headquarters for the night. Here might be paintings and woodcarvings, or a library of books finely bound ; things that helped to bring back circulation to the soldier's numbed mind. It became increasingly important to find good quarters at the journey's end, which was timed for Christmas Eve ; and as we left the foothills for the alluvial plain of the Rhine, I rode forward to reconnoitre the village of Flerzheim which had been allotted to two companies. Good quarters were few, and my choice fell immediately upon a nunnery with seventeenth-century turrets, which stood in moated seclusion on the outskirts of the place. The Mother Superior, with the parish priest, received me on the threshold and was not surprised to hear that officers and men would be quartered on her. The priest observed that it had been happening ever since the Thirty Years' War. One wing of the ground floor, and half the cells in the main corridor of the floor above, had been evacuated already and the two parts of the building separated by curtains (also, I fear, by barricades). The Mother Superior kindly offered me her own cell, as she had withdrawn with the rest. In half an hour all was settled ; and within a week the mess servants were handing in our rations at the kitchen window and the nuns, growing themselves rosier each day, were cooking the best meals I had known in my military career. Life had definitely begun again, and theatre was about to begin.

## 5

## GERMANY, 1919

Of the German disorders that followed the Armistice we saw nothing, for we were ourselves following the retreating army through the Rhineland at a disrespectful distance, and the arrival of our troops automatically preserved order in the occupied zone. But within a few weeks news came from Berlin of the Spartacus movement, in which Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg tried to arm the workers and seize power for communism. The Mother Superior was much perturbed about the activities of Red Rosa — “one of those hot-blooded Polish females” as the parish priest declared. Rosa must have been very prim compared with their vision of her. In that winter, while we skated round the nunnery moat or rode across the plains hunting hares, in the intervals of parades and educational lectures for the troops, Germany was plainly agonizing in mind as well as body. This was the background of literature and the theatre, and one might have expected that the drama of the streets would drive the drama altogether from the stage; but actually the will to expression was too strong to be



stified. New writers pressed forward to seize the stages which had functioned with German thoroughness during four years of war ; the organization was all ready for them. and understanding audiences and critics were ready too. There was no spirit of defeated chauvinism such as the Nazis have since pictured and invoked. The people wanted to hear what New Germany with its saddler head of the provisional government had to say, and Europe wanted to hear it too. Whatever political blunders had been or were to be made, the feeling of that time was one of stubborn hope. *Nie Wieder Krieg*, never again, was the watchword oftenest heard passing from mouth to mouth ; and we who were still in soldiers' uniforms echoed it as heartily as any German civilian in his threadbare suit.

As a German-speaking officer I was bound to be assigned some sort of special duty, and there was even talk of a regular commission with field rank and years of prospective service on the Rhine. Luckily at this moment a temporary post came along, and made the authorities forget about the matter. I was to be appointed commandant of Elsenborn Camp near Aix-la-Chapelle, a bleak place, 2000 feet up, which had been the concentration point for the original invasion of Belgium. The divisional general added that I could sleep in Ludendorff's bed, some disarmed German officers in charge of stores would join me at meals, the hotel up there was said to have a good cellar, and one could shoot small deer in the forests but I must take an armed bodyguard if I went out with the keepers. I thanked him and went into his staff office, where a bargain was made that this command should carry with it short leave at my own reason-

able discretion, and a pass by rail or any other form of transport to Cologne. No motor vehicles could be relied on to reach Elsenborn in winter, so I set out mounted for this elevated spot, accompanied by two junior officers and a detachment on limbered wagons. The camp was only two feet deep in snow when we arrived, but four feet deep soon afterwards, so that we were cut off for the best part of a week and then provisioned by pack mule. Otherwise the place was as described, Ludendorff's bed was comfortable, one of the Germans played chess, and the host produced Marcobrunners and Jesuitengartens of mature years and character. I mounted a guard which presented arms impeccably by day and was dismissed after dinner. The few deer I shot at made off indignant and unharmed.

At the first melting of the snows (and there are several meltings in the Rhineland) I took my accumulated leave and made a playgoing visit of ten days to Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne in our zone and Coblenz in that of the French. The city of Charlemagne was disappointing as a theatre town, and Coblenz had only an uninspired playhouse ; but the chief theatre in Cologne included in its repertory practically every play of merit written in Germany since 1914. One of them certainly was *Der Bettler* by Reinhard Sorge, a dramatic poet who fell at Verdun. It was the first expressionist drama, and perhaps the best because it never left the plane of poetry. The subject was modern but yet timeless, just one of those German domestic dramas that in prose can be so boring ; the verse irregular and strong, seldom lyrical, always dramatic. The staging showed an understanding of the expressionist mind ; across the proscenium hung a fine

gauze, that now familiar device for preventing the diffusion of light on a subdivided scene. Symbolic arrangements of pieces of furniture and a stove, café seats on a raised terrace, a high window and the shrubs of a garden, formed the subdivision. The lighting moved from one part of this scene to another, leaving all the unlighted part invisible. In 1919 this was most impressive, and it would be so to-day. A work of rare interest was being directed and played as it should be.

And what, pray, is expressionism? the reader may reasonably ask, for it is some time since this word was current in the theatre. The answer is simpler than the dramatic critics, who signally failed to understand the movement, would have the public believe. Expressionism is, or should be, one form of the poetry of the stage — the writer's form which seeks to give the essential rather than the detail of drama, and so to help the actor to give the essential of acting and the director and the scenic artist to give the essential in presentation. The aim of expressionist drama is clearly allied to that of imagist verse and impressionist painting; but the name itself became specially attached to middle-European dramatic writing in the years between 1917 and, say, 1927. I should say that expressionism perished because few who practised it were poets themselves, and of the others too few understood how to contribute to the general poetry of theatre. When the dramatic history of our century comes to be written this movement may appear much more important than it appears now, a few years after its decline and virtual abandonment by dramatists. These nameless characters of the expressionist imagination, the Mr. and Mrs.

Zeros or other numerical figments, played their part in a fermentation of the creative mind which was the possible forerunner of a new dramatic poetry. And in its wildest extravagances the actor and the director found stuff to work upon.

At first I felt a certain shyness in attending these evenings at the Cologne theatre, which was seldom patronized by foreign officers in uniform. The middle-class audience which promenaded in the intervals, slightly paler and more haggard than the Munich audience of old, stared at me as none but promenading Germans can ever stare. An official of the management approached and asked me deferentially whether I represented the *Zensur* of the British authorities, and when I replied that I was there for pleasure he begged a thousand official pardons. Editors and dramatic reviewers put me at my ease, and I met people not only in Cologne but in Bonn among the university staff. I returned to my camp on the frontier with experience of half a dozen new and vital plays and a library of expressionist drama up to date. Signs of spring were appearing, and we became busy as an overnight halt for horses and mules brought by road from France to supply the Rhine Army. Hundreds of these were making their last journey, having been marked for civilian consumption. With them rode young officers, innocent of war, who ate and drank, slept and passed on. Beginning to feel like an innkeeper, I applied for early demobilization, and even for a consular post which I did not seriously want. Divisional headquarters, as I had hoped, was sufficiently impressed to recall me to battalion duty so that I should hand over to a possible successor. I returned by way of Cologne,

where they were now playing *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts* by Georg Kaiser. The opportunity of seeing this play was welcome, for it seemed the most characteristic prose work the expressionists had produced, and so the best to translate for the English-speaking stage.

At the nunnery, all was changed except the benevolence of the nuns ; the Army of the war was visibly dissolving, and on the horse lines my old roan and his groom were the only survivors. They were to remain a few weeks longer, for it was typical of routine that I should now be given short leave to England. This included a day or two in Cologne each way (with more playgoing) and a protracted journey by the Boulogne express, which lived on the reputation that it had once been three days late. The spell of leave itself was very welcome : one of the contacts I renewed was with the Stage Society which had just given *The Beaux' Stratagem* by Farquhar. The consular post came to nothing, but I was offered interesting work by the successors to Baedeker in the English publishing world. One of their projects was a handbook to the Western Front, Belgium and Northern France ; and the queer association of history and art, architecture and war made an appeal to me. I must have been back in Germany in full spring, for the Rhine valley was all fruit blossom from Cologne to Coblenz, and Bonn was once more a university town with youth in its veins. Like school-boys at the end of term (for that is what it means to be on the verge of demobilization) another major and I rode to the Rhine one morning early, stabled our horses and took ferry to the forbidden and neutral zone of the Siebengebirge, where we walked from wooded height to height in the

deepest solitude I have ever known on mountains. Next morning early I was awakened by my orderly with my final Army orders, which were to proceed to the Crystal Palace by way of Rotterdam.

In thirty-three years of life I had hitherto successfully avoided visiting the Crystal Palace, which is one of several English equivalents of Coney Island. Not even the great Saturday evening firework displays of Messrs. Brock had drawn me there. But as a gateway to civilian freedom this glassy structure, originally set up in Hyde Park for Victoria's Great Exhibition, glittered with a fantastic glamour. Just twenty years later I was to see its original cement foundations, close to Knightsbridge, laid bare by mechanical diggers and cranes filling sandbags with earth in readiness for the second German war. But for the moment my dream was the Crystal Palace and demobilization was my Bank Holiday. I saw it refulgent before me as we rode for the last time through the German forests on the way to the station. My groom was to take back the roan ; it was hard to part from this animal who had been mine for three years and had once been wounded under me but retrieved from the Base. I celebrated the last night in Cologne by going to the opera-house instead of a theatre, and afterwards went round to talk with the English players under Esme Percy who had by this time started a stage of their own in the city and were performing plays by Shaw and others. Next morning a mixed crowd of officers and men of all units, unknown to each other but united by the wish not to be soldiers any more, sailed down the Rhine towards Holland. We sang a great deal and drank very little, although the propensity of

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

the English for drinking aboard river steamboats is well known. When Germany was left behind and the windmills came into sight on the flat river-banks, we raised a cheer.

Holland seems to me a country permanently unmemorable, however often it is visited. This time we were not to be rewarded even by seeing galleries of great pictures, for the cities themselves were out of bounds. I recall dimly a railroad journey to the Hook, where the Harwich boat was alongside ; and much more vividly the North Sea passage on a still moonlit night and the view of the Essex coast at dawn — strangely unlike the view of Kentish cliffs seen hitherto by soldiers on short leave. There cannot have been one of us aboard who did not feel the finality of this experience, the laying down of arms and taking up of a life that was either unknown or almost forgotten. The boys in their early twenties were entitled to feel happiest about it, for despite certain deficiencies of education they could start from the beginning ; we in the thirties had no illusory belief that 1919 would be in the least like 1914. And so we berthed in Harwich, came to London in the early morning, and by noon were forming lines at tables in the Crystal Palace to receive our papers. It was a pleasure, that evening, to get into civilian clothes.

Now that it is closing, I see that this chapter is itself rather expressionist, giving as it does the essential and not the detail of a half-year suspended, as it were, between war and peace. In retrospect also I see the Germany and her stage of this time midway between Munich as I had known it and Berlin and Salzburg as they were to be seen a few years

later. At a revolutionary time — for 1919 was so in every country more or less — the stage was making new and positive gestures of its own. I had the good fortune to see them in their full significance, because in Germany the theatre was a genuine reflection of a people's dramatic will ; it was not, as in post-war Soviet Russia or in the total state of to-day, an instrument of policy. It was still too early for some of the best dramatic writing that came out of this time of struggle, though Toller's *Die Wandlung* and Fritz von Unruh's *Ein Geschlecht* were already written, beside Sorge's play which has been described. But the stage was not waiting for only dramatists ; acting and especially direction were making gestures of their own. The style of the Burgtheater was now completely outmoded and a byword among the profession — very much as "ham" acting is a byword to-day. The work of directors began to be described as *stilisiert* or *konstruktivist*, and *schöpferische Leitung* (creative direction) was something more than a new theatre fashion. It was odd to be returning to a country where such developments had scarcely been heard of, and manifestly impossible in the mood of 1919 to enlist any but the most limited English sympathy for a movement of German origin.

The effect of it all was to give me a strong urge toward constructive theatre criticism — not dramatic criticism as the London reviewers understand it, narrating the plot of the play at length and adding a few words about the acting at the end, but illumination of the stage in its capacity as a bearer of works of art. Had the *New Age* still existed in its old form I would have written for it weekly ; but Orage had turned it into a Social Credit organ, and he himself



## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

emigrated first to France and then to America. The *New Statesman* gave me space for a few articles, and Desmond MacCarthy, as always, showed himself sympathetic to the new idea. Other colleagues in criticism like William Archer received me kindly and took care that I had work to do. In this first civilian summer I rose at six every morning and set about the task of furnishing new material for our stage ; the first play was to be Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, and in my rosy imagination there were many to follow. Revisiting the hills of my native Somerset, and driving a gig around its villages on a first properly-arranged honeymoon, I persevered with this project which was to be realized in due measure.

## 6

LONDON, 1919-21

Here, then, I found myself one of some millions of soldiers turned civilians — sharing their sense of deliverance and freedom but also of unrest. I write of these things twenty-one years later, by the warmth of an open fire which itself has been kindled from the timber of neighbours' houses destroyed in this month of October 1940. Our physical façade of common existence is now scarred if not shattered : there is no room for social complacency any more : and since all of us lead a soldier's life in some degree, we may contrive to face the outbreak of peace with more unity and less disillusion than in 1919. Nobody will make us unfilled promises of a land fit for heroes : we shall hope to work out and make for ourselves the stupendous changes in our world.

But my own memory of 1919-20 is plain enough : it was a time of impatience, of protest, of action that threatened many abrupt and even violent issues. Socially, politically, intellectually, masses of soldiers and civilians wanted to make an end of established things. Some felt themselves

disarmed at the moment when, armed, they could have imposed their will on Europe and not only on the former enemy who has since become an enemy again. In my own middle thirties, with the wild oats of a socialist youth long since sown and almost forgotten, I felt again the urge of deep discontent that has driven some men to fascism or communism and has made others opportunists, cynics, adventurers or vain seekers after religious faiths.

One contact with the social structure of England was to be found in the theatre, where I had worked in former years. I went to it, not for the moment as professional critic, but as adventurer and observer. Two characteristic London plays of that demobilization period come to mind. Somerset Maugham's *Home and Beauty* pleased me hugely by its farcical-satirical pattern, worthy almost of Wilde, and by the bitter laughter echoing below its surface. A. A. Milne's *Mr. Pim Passes By* filled me with a hearty unjust rage. Either of them, essentially, might have been written in the days of Edwardian or Georgian peace ; and I came to them out of the volcanic eruption of Middle Europe after war. Looking at this sort of drama gave me the sense of detachment, both from current criticism and creative activity, which has been with me ever since. I have never wished to express, either as critic or playwright or producer, anything but a personal taste in drama formed by personal experiences not lightly to be shared.

How should I try to tell the English public, for instance, that to understand their own current mood and thought they must look to the stage abroad and not at home ? They discovered this for themselves ten or fifteen years later, when

American drama evidently became the most vital in the English language. And meantime they prided themselves justly on the possession of Shaw, who had been a foreigner before the war and remained a foreigner afterwards. He was even, in his own static way, more understandable to the English than any other foreigner ; for he had never changed his mind about anything, and had been as inevitably right or wrong in 1900 or 1910 as in 1920, 1930 or 1940.

In 1919 Shaw was represented only by a revival of *Arms and the Man*, for *Heartbreak House* and *Back to Methuselah* were still unwritten. The retirement of Granville-Barker as producer-manager meant that one could look nowhere in particular for standards of direction and acting. The disappearance of the older type of actor-manager, with his deplorable choice of plays but careful personal control, added to the uncertainty of the playgoer. The stage seemed to have few ideas beyond that of waiting for young writers to come along — a good enough idea in itself, if the young writers could have bridged the gap formed by war and secured their own intellectual footing on the hither side of it. But in practice the bridging of this gap was left to men of middle age and more — to Shaw and Barrie and Galsworthy, Maugham and Bennett. These men inevitably wrote about the world as they had previously known it, or as it had seemed to them all their lives ; and they were encouraged by the English tendency to win a war and lean back as usual.

Still, noteworthy adventures began here and there. One of them was at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, a former vaudeville house a few miles west of London's theatreland.

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

A far-sighted group had rented this old place cheaply ; and here the company of Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre gave John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*, a chronicle play welcomed by a public whose own eyes were fixed on the drama of Versailles and the treaty-makers. There was much in common between the problems of President Lincoln and President Wilson. In fact the hour of this drama could not have been better chosen ; and old and young theatregoers rallied to give it a run of many months. At the Lyric Theatre itself, the way was prepared for further successes lasting years under Nigel Playfair's direction. The English stage had by no means produced a masterpiece in Drinkwater's play, still less had it come into line with the creative spirit of the rest of Europe ; but the gesture was serious and well-intentioned, and the work gave some foreshadowings of dramatic poetry that might be written.

The Hammersmith Lyric soon became the regular home of the Sunday evening play societies, the Stage Society in particular. This pioneer producing unit had survived the war with credit, thanks partly to its revivals of Old English classics. In 1919 it sponsored a new Sunday Theatre called the Phoenix, whose opening play was Webster's tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*. Our stage history shows that such enterprises, explorations of the rich mine of English dramatic literature, are established from time to time and flourish long enough to acquaint a generation of playgoers with classic treasures. The productions of the Mermaid Society and William Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society were within the memory of the founders of the Phoenix, who rightly felt

that to see the greatest tragedies of Marlowe, Jonson or Webster, or the comedies of Congreve and Farquhar, is an experience to be valued throughout a lifetime. So in fact it proved to be ; and those Sunday evenings with the old masters of dramatic poetry, presented in a simple convertible set and played by our best Shakespearean artists, were landmarks of the after-war years.

It was harder to make a way on the English stage for new European drama, which had been the special function of the Stage Society for twenty years. Still harder, of course, when the play bore the name of one of the German or Russian expressionists. I offered Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* to the Society within six months of the Armistice, and managed to get it performed within a year ; but not until several West End theatres had been refused for the performance of a German play, and some members of the cast (though not Edith Evans) had thrown up their parts for the same reason. In episodic form, the drama follows the adventures of a bank cashier who falls under the spell of a lady client "rustling in furs and silk" at his counter, embezzles money in the hope of possessing her, is indignantly repulsed by her as the virtuous mother of a grown-up son, and thereafter wanders through the city pleasure-seeking, casting his cash to the winds in mingled disillusionment and exaltation, until finally he is brought to a Salvation Army meeting where all are exalted and all disillusioned with the things of this world, and shoots himself there. This modern morality has a throng of nameless characters, vivid flashes of action, and a twist of heavy satire. The English production was reviewed as a regrettable breach of taste, although it was

admitted that Brember Wills, and later Claude Rains, gave first-rate performances in the cashier's part.

And so expressionism made its first and almost its last appearance on our stage, although some years later the Stage Society presented Elmer Rice's experiment in the same style, *The Adding Machine*. I learned much from Kaiser's technique as a playwright in *From Morn to Midnight* — it is indeed a model of economy and rapidity of movement — and also made my first contact with the American stage through this play, which was one of the early and creditable productions of the New York Theatre Guild. Thus in the summer of 1920 I was in Berlin for a brief visit, discussing the presentation in English with directors of the Guild and in German with grave *Regisseure* who had handled it for their own stage. But European capitals were still chattering with machine-guns, and it was no time yet for a general theatre tour. I returned by way of Paris, where playgoers were interested in such new dramatists as Charles Vildrac (*Paquebot Tenacity*), Georges Duhamel (*L, Œuvre des Athlètes*) and Jules Romains (*Doctor Knock*). These plays, so essentially different from the *dramas d'amour* of French tradition, were already finding their way into the lists of the London Stage Society and New York Guild. There was also a new French interest in direction, which showed that the work of Copeau at the Vieux-Colombier had borne fruit. The next phase, then beginning, was to be the establishment of little professional theatres, well off the Grands Boulevards, under such directors as Gaston Baty, Louis Jouvet, Georges Dullin and Georges Pitoëff; and these directors in turn were to bring new writers before the public.

With us in London, another producing management in the suburbs was quick to follow the lead given by Hammer-smith with *Abraham Lincoln*. The Everyman Theatre in Hampstead opened in 1920 with Benavente's comedy *Bonds of Interest* (*Los Intereses Creados*), which had also been a Theatre Guild production. For the next five years it was inadvisable to miss a new play at the Everyman, uneven as the direction of the theatre under Norman Macdermott proved to be. Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound* and Noel Coward's *The Vortex* were done there for the first time ; but the revivals of Shaw and Ibsen and the first English presentations of plays by O'Neill and Susan Glaspell deserved even more credit. Eventually its own successful policy of making transfers of plays to the West End sapped the independence of the Everyman, which had begun life as a drill-hall and eventually became a highbrow movie-house.

At the other end of our theatre's social scale were the Ballets Russes which had been reconstructed by Diaghilev with a brilliant troupe, and had enlisted all the talent of the modernist musicians, painters and designers. The Ballets Russes were popular in 1920-21 as never before or since ; for although the total audience of Ballet must have grown from year to year until the present time, the post-war seasons had a special character of delight and surprise. They were also vigorously productive, for they saw the creation of *Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, *La Boutique Fantasque* and *Le Tricorne*, probably the three ballets since the time of *Carnaval* and *Les Sylphides* which have longest held their appeal. Lydia Lopokova had returned to the company, Massine was



both choreographer and dancer, and though Karsavina's appearances were few, they gave their own distinction. The genuinely appreciative audience was as large at the Empire or the Alhambra as it was in later years at the more social Covent Garden. The repertory was in its full classical and romantic bloom when, in 1921, Diaghilev overreached himself and mistook his English public by presenting *The Sleeping Princess* at full length. But in all the presentations leading up to this splendid piece of pageantry set by Bakst to the steps of Petipa and the music of Tchaikovsky, the Russian Ballet formed an astonishing contrast with the London stage of stale drawing-room comedy, wearisome intellectual argument, tasteless musical revue or drab detective drama. No wonder that some of us turned from this sort of reality to the vision of creative direction, and hoped to see drama place its own spoken poetry at the service of that other wordless poetry of theatre, formed by the union of many arts.

Edward Gordon Craig in his Italian exile had for years maintained the concept of theatre as an art like those of music, sculpture, painting or architecture — an art in itself and not simply an exact reproduction of something imagined and written down by a dramatist. But it would have been hard to find common ground between Craig's idea of creative direction and that of a Reinhardt, a Tairov, a Meierhold or a Stanislavsky. To try to form a judgment of one's own, it was necessary to study the work of these other experienced men, or at least of some of them. One had also to take into account the fact that the theatre was in a transitional state, changing fast in personnel and in direction and

even in dramatic output under the growing influence of the screen. In a film, all direction was clearly "creative"; nobody held that an author should "write" a film and then that a company of players should "act" it scene by scene. If the theatre should decide to turn its back on creative direction altogether, and to become a dramatist's platform only, then many fine talents still attracted to the service of living drama would go over to the screen because of the wider, though not necessarily the deeper, scope it offered to their imagination. The respective resources of stage and screen had to be considered too. The more the stage confined itself to a simple reproduction of the written drama of the playwright, the less was its chance of competing commercially with the broad and varied though often tawdry vision of the screen director. This divergence of scope and aim between the two arts might well result in an uncommercial drama withdrawing itself into small theatres whose artists were resolved to hold the living contact of stage and spectator; while the movie-houses would grow vaster and vaster and make more and more inroads upon the imagination of writers and the talent of players.

We can now see how far both these tendencies have already gone; but if one were asked to fix the time of their beginning, I would place it about the year 1920. The contrasts then were between the director's and the dramatist's theatre. Later, the issue was confused by the equal avidity with which the screen devoured the available talent of both stages, from creative directors like Reinhardt to realist playwrights like the author of *Journey's End*. But in 1920 one could still indulge dreams of a dramatic theatre as splendid

as the dance-theatre of Russian Ballet ; one could imagine great poetry spoken by living players in a rich and lovely setting. I confess to having had these illusions, and am not at all ashamed of them. It was no part of my task to foresee the absorption of all kinds of dramatic art into the framework of a vast international industry serving hundreds of millions of eyes and ears. Nor could anyone but a technician have prophesied how soon the movie would talk, and how soon it would be coloured ; or how soon (maybe) it would become stereoscopic and three-dimensional and indistinguishable from the pageant of the stage, either through the agency of radio-television or ordinary projection by the multiple lens. One might have guessed all these things separately, but scarcely together. Speculation in any case is barren. It remains possible to suppose that either through man's weariness of the complicated dramatic machine he has created, or through its perfection into a truly non-mechanical vehicle, creative direction as a theatre man understands it may yet come into its own.

I think it was just when I was occupied with these thoughts about the theatre, in the summer of 1920, that Nigel Playfair made his famous revival of *The Beggar's Opera* at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Here certainly was creative direction of a kind, for an original pattern and colour were imposed on John Gay's text and even on Linley's score, much rewritten. A masterpiece that must have been rich in sinister light and shadow, and is known to have inspired fury if not alarm in many playgoers when it was first given in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1728, acquired something of the character of a toyshop and the spirit of a charade

in Playfair's production and the gay designs of Lovat Fraser. They hit a certain taste to perfection, and people who liked to see theatre slightly guying itself, instead of fiercely satirizing a fashion as the authors originally meant it to do, passed many blissful if complacent evenings in their dingy stalls at Hammersmith, almost the only setting that was truly in accord with the opera. The production became fabulous and ran for years ; and indeed Macheath and the wenches had far more vitality than any other stage figures of the time, for their original conception survived the trivial retouchings of the picture.

The year 1921, the sunlit year of hock and moselle and other noble wines, saw an endeavour to restore the fortunes of the Court Theatre, where the Vedrenne-Barker management had flourished fifteen years earlier. Here was the first presentation of *Heartbreak House*, nearly if not quite Shaw's best — a judgment that seems every time to be compelled by the vitality of this man. Actually all plays are his best, and with Shaw the vintages of 1906 and 1921 are indistinguishable.

At some time during that long dry summer I found occasion to wander through Northern and Eastern France, and falling in with an American girl and her Russian musician friend on the platform of Strasbourg station, to travel on with them to the Bavarian Alps, bathe in the lakes, hear the *Ring* in Munich Prinzregententheater where the Wagner Festival had just been resumed, and return by way of Paris to Brittany to see one of the *Pardons*. I think it must have been that of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, in which white-robed maidens, standing upright in fishermen's boats, come

up the estuary of a river at flood-tide bringing offerings of flowers to their patroness.

The end of this journey was to be Pointe de l'Arcouest, near Paimpol, a harbour in which was moored the yacht *Eglantine* owned by Seignobos, professor of history at the Sorbonne, one of whose closest friends was Madame Curie. Through French relatives, an Englishman and his Russian wife came to know and visit them both. On the deck of the yacht, in company with painters, writers and students of the Quartier, we sailed among the turret-like red sandstone islands, some of which vanish altogether at high tide. The ocean-going barques of this part of Brittany go out for months together to the cod fisheries of the Newfoundland Banks, two or three days by liner from New York ; and here sometimes the Atlantic passenger can see them, mounting full sail, on a misty horizon.

## 7

## EUROPE REOPENED

**A**n exciting London event of the next year, 1922, was the Stage Society's production of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. This has proved to be one of the most unpopular works in modern dramatic history ; no doubt for the double reason that it deals with the process of theatre behind the scenes, and has an interest mainly psychological. Actually Pirandello inverts drama as completely as Shaw ever inverted heroism, romance or idealism ; and the one thing the inversion of drama will do is to empty a theatre. But the first appearance of the play was no less provocative for that. Everybody talked about it ; and either one compared Pirandello with Einstein and said that he had dramatized the principle of relativity, or one pooh-poohed the whole entertaining affair and pointed out that when the characters, after wandering on to the bare stage of a theatre in search of a dramatist for their moving personal story, had come to the end of their imaginative tether, they resorted to the trick of " evoking " a real person outside their own drama in the shape of Madame Pace the dressmaker. A motive of

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

genuine comedy was the embellishment by tone and gesture of the scenes which were taken over by a company of "real" actors who had lived them and knew just what they were like. But this was merely a subtle critique by an Italian of the conventions of his native stage, where false embellishment has been the rule and tradition. The European vogue of *Six Characters* lasted only a short while, and its end was hastened by the repetitive style of the other works of Pirandello which came from the Teatro dell' Arte in Rome.

The play remains a distinguished curiosity of drama. It may have been a Western European attempt to parallel in a drama of thought the "constructivism" with which Meierhold and others were experimenting in Soviet stagecraft. Just then we heard much about this theatrical movement, and saw many pictures of queer productions in Moscow; but it was difficult to visit Russia and see for oneself, and by the time the country was thrown open to "Intourists" there was less to be seen. In the early 1920's, however, the truly left-minded could accept as an article of faith (never having seen it) that the Russian stage was the only one even possibly worthwhile. Actually, out of all this Soviet architecture of ladders and platforms, out of all the clambering of actors in and out of windows and their marching up and down stairways, nothing of value to our current theatre seems to have survived. Constructivism represented a brief attempt to vary the two-dimensional character of the stage picture; and most of the talents responsible for it have since gone over to the screen, where the scope for varying the picture is greater.

In the same year 1922 the Stage Society gave *The Rumour*

by C. K. Munro, a writer who promised for a while to link the impulse of English drama with that of the best in Europe. This was the first of a trilogy of his plays — the two others were *Progress* and *The Mountain* — which handled major post-war issues of statecraft and economics. Munro's plan was to invent some Ruritanian country where syndicates were struggling for the control of oil or minerals, workmen and capitalists were staking out their respective claims, generals and politicians were carrying on political intrigues, and so forth. The exact resemblance of the Ruritanian country to all others in Europe was the moral of the dramatic fable. A prodigious volubility smothered Munro's theatrical effect, though it gave him an individual line and character. Such plays were refreshing in our English theatre which could only boast, at the same period, the witty and rotund perfection of Maugham's *The Circle* at the Haymarket. Maugham was kind to his players too ; he maintained our international reputation for high comedy, and he was performed as smoothly in Berlin or Paris as in London. Around Shaftesbury Avenue there was still no sign of a stage concerned with anything but realistic drama. From Shaw and Munro to Maugham and Milne and Galsworthy, every writer declared his faithful adherence to the lifelike stage, the dramatist's own platform. As a critic and observer I was turning more and more against such a convention, but looking further afield than England for any hope of change.

During the summer I went to Germany. The times were uncertain, for inflation had started and was proceeding in a series of waves. Every visiting foreigner at this moment was



## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

in effect a millionaire ; for everything from a long taxi drive or a railroad ticket across the country to a meal at a restaurant, a bottle of good wine or a seat at the play, cost a matter of ten cents. In Berlin I found it hard to spend two pounds (say ten dollars) a week ; and even this sum allowed for books and suchlike purchases. In thirty years of travel I have never known such complete indifference to the monetary cost of things ; and I cannot feel it to be pleasing or satisfying in any way. The sense of robbing a nation, by some obscure economic process, is ever present.

Berlin theatres are mostly closed in summer, but that year Reinhardt was presenting at the Grosses Schauspielhaus a play by the young Bavarian, Ernst Toller, who had been a Minister in the brief Soviet Government at Munich in 1919, and had since been imprisoned in a fortress. Oddly, the subject of *Die Maschinenstürmer* (The Machine-Wreckers) was drawn from English history. Toller had read Lord Byron's impassioned speech of 1812 in the House of Lords against the Frame-Work Bill, which would have added the breaking of machine-frames in the textile industry to the list of capital crimes. In the industrial background of this action stood the figure of one Ludd, leader of the weavers in the "Luddite" riots against the introduction of machinery to the factories of the Midlands. This was a great theme, for the war of man against his machine does not belong to the nineteenth century or the Industrial Revolution only. Especially it was a theme for an imprisoned rebel of 1919, who sought to connect the legacy of European war with the crisis brought about by mechanical development.

The Grosses Schauspielhaus, a huge oval circus-like

building of remarkable ugliness, was much better suited to the crowd scenes of Toller's drama than to the intimate passages in which the issue between workman and employer is defined. The former were played in the arena of the theatre, amid the spectators ; the latter on the raised stage within a proscenium. As a director Reinhardt was not seen at his best in this production, for he was uninterested in the social aspect of the play and bored by his author's sentiment : what he liked best was the sinister visual building-up of the Engine, the enemy of mankind against which the masses break themselves, breaking at the same time the body of their idealist fellow-workman. I looked forward to a simpler presentation in which the Engine should consist of shadows of wheels and crankshafts, and the more personal scenes should be given their full value. However it were done, this play was obviously one for the English stage ; and the immediate problem was how to meet Toller and discuss with him the translation I was resolved to make. His other play, *Masse-Mensch* (Masses and Men), which had been given a year earlier by the Volksbühne in Berlin, was already to appear in English.

The fortress of Niederschönenfeld, where the author was imprisoned, stood near Augsburg in the plain through which the Upper Danube flows. And at the Three Moors in Augsburg, one of the half-dozen great inns of Europe, I should certainly be able to hire a car (at the current rate of ten cents) for the journey. It was inadvisable to speak of Toller in this town, for here he had been taken prisoner by Noske's troops after his followers had spent their ammunition on chickens and the like. So I set out from Augsburg

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

in the car, and after many miles reached a gloomy village with a gloomier-looking gaol surrounded by rusty barbed wire. Gone, evidently, were the days when fortress imprisonment was an agreeable vacation for political offenders in Germany — when they could put themselves on parole each morning and go hunting, fishing, whoring or what-not for the day. This prison of Niederschönenfeld looked a hard place to get out of and even to get into. I should never have got into it at all but for the fact that my passport, which I presented at the gate, still described me by the military rank of major. This is a higher rank in Germany than in England, and means battalion commander. The governor of this gaol was only a captain, and he wanted to see what an English major looked like, so that I was admitted at once.

Only once before had I been inside a gaol, and that was years ago in London to visit a publisher, who had been incarcerated not for publishing, but for bigamy. I remember thinking of the comparatively trivial nature of this offence while I was being led through stone corridors to the office of the governor, a close-cropped man in grey uniform who stood up and clicked his heels. He proved to be intelligent and considerate, as most German army men are, by contrast with the civilian riff-raff who get into uniform. He told me the conditions of my interview with the prisoner Toller, namely that no subject must be mentioned on either side except the production of his play in England, or kindred professional matters. A warder would be present to see that these conditions were enforced. No other language but German must be used. After further clicking of heels and

bowing, I was admitted under escort to a wing of the building where the political prisoners were walking up and down a broad corridor, from which their cells opened on either side.

Toller was an eager, nervous man under thirty, whose eyes betrayed the mental strain of his imprisonment. He led me into his cell, where in a top corner was built the swallows' nest about which he had written *The Swallow-Book*. He read me passages of this long poem while the warder, on a stool by the doorway, sat looking vacantly before him. Outside, the other prisoners padded up and down. It would be strange indeed if human beings, thrown together in this extraordinary situation of Toller and myself, should not feel an instant friendship. If this feeling grew less in future years in London and elsewhere, it was because Toller's real creative period ended with his release. I could not be interested in his politics, which were of the sentimental left-wing rather than the communist order, or in his *Weltschmerz*. But for a while he wrote marvellous things, and he touched expressionism with poetry.

We parted after a short hour which had been allowed for the interview, having agreed about the translation both of the play and the poem (the latter was brought out by the Oxford University Press a year afterwards). I took leave of the governor of this gaol and drove, not back to Augsburg, but to the old town of Ingolstadt on the Danube, whence I could take the evening train to Munich. Toller had told me that if only he could be let out of prison, he would spend the first three days of freedom in running about a forest. At dinner over my bottle of Steinberger I recall

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

wondering how long freedom for the rest of us would last, and what it was worth. I got into the train with a German tennis champion, who was going to play in a tournament at Munich. His ambition was to play at Wimbledon, and as long as we spoke of tennis he was a most amiable fellow. Then he asked me what I was doing in Bavaria, and I told him of my visit that day to the fortress. His eyes hardened as he said, " But Toller is a Jew ". At the time this struck me as irrelevant and even funny, for Toller had every German characteristic. But deep in the blue eyes of this tennis-player was foreshadowed the darkness of Europe. I got out of the train at Munich feeling that the city was not quite as before ; superstition was strangling its good-nature. I had to walk up the Zugspitze for fresh air ; and when I came down from the mountain huts, three days later, my stock of paper money had dwindled in value by a half. The farmers of the villages were fingering million-mark notes and wondering what to do with them, for their yards were already stacked with agricultural machinery bought from Krupps, and they had paid off the mortgages on their farms for the price of an old suit of clothes. Inflation makes the peasant king.

I had just money enough left to visit Breslau for some dramatic celebrations in honour of Gerhart Hauptmann, who was then celebrating his sixtieth birthday. A series of his plays was very well done by the company of the city theatre, reinforced by players from Berlin. This dramatist had been considered as a possible President of the Republic ; and he had every claim to be called the " representative man " of cultural Germany. Here in Silesia, among his own

people, his peasant plays made a notable effect ; but I liked best *Florian Geyer*, a drama of the peasants' war in a defeated but hopeful Middle Europe. And so to the Baltic coast, where I rejoined a wife and a daughter aged eighteen months who was making sand castles on that tideless and mosquito-ridden shore. Back in Berlin, we took our tickets to Dover for a couple of dollars by the sleeping-car night express, and were relieved to get out of Germany for the time being. At Aachen there was trouble about a new baby carriage, the export duty on which was so enormous that I presented it to a grateful (and no doubt prolific) customs official. At Namur I inadvertently left my hat in a dining-car destined for Paris, with the result that in Brussels we were within a few francs of destitution. Nobody will cash a cheque for a man without a hat or the means to buy one ; this is a curious psychological fact to be borne in mind by tourists. In Dover, to which we pressed forward hastily, hunger overtook the whole family and we had to send our infant daughter to beg food from complete strangers on the shingle beach, until I was able to borrow the fare to London and telegraph funds from there. This poverty-stricken ending of the journey was the right contrast to a beginning with the riches of Croesus.

Next spring, that of 1923, *The Machine-Wreckers* was done by the Stage Society at the Kingsway Theatre. Nugent Monck of the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, the only Elizabethan playhouse in England, came to London to direct the play ; and very beautifully and simply he did it. Herbert Marshall, who has since become a screen star, played the chief part. A. B. Walkley of *The Times* was

moved to praise the drama and the dramatist. The Old Vic should have put on this play of the Luddites, which with all its faults had the classical line ; but such was not the policy of the Old Vic in those days. The two performances gave me complete satisfaction, for I never expected any more, and my other occupations as editor and reviewer had allowed me to do the six months' work for nothing.

Good plays of another kind, like St. John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*, had been produced for brief runs in London and had made as creditable a mark without achieving much more success. Very bad plays like William Archer's *The Green Goddess* had come out in the same year and run month after month. Many people were astonished that Archer, the pioneer of Ibsen and the revered chief of English dramatic critics, should have written so ordinary a melodrama. But he had attended first nights for years with an umbrella under his arm and a detective story in his pocket to be read between the acts, while less austere critics were at the theatre bar. *The Green Goddess* was the kind of play he really believed in : it was written not at all with tongue in cheek but with the utmost and most limpid sincerity. When it was produced at the St. James's, with George Arliss in some preposterous Indian Rajah part, all Archer's fellow-critics were presented in the foyer with a copy of the work.

A few weeks after the beginning of the run William Archer asked me to come and see him, and with great kindness offered to suggest me to one editor at least, and possibly to more, as his successor in dramatic reviewing. He added with Scottish caution that he could not be sure how long the present tenfold increase of his income would

last, and it would be better to move slowly. The time might come when he would be glad to take up the work again, but meanwhile I was welcome to keep it going. I thanked him and accepted willingly, assuring him that he would never need a critic's hard-earned pay again. We parted with a word about his son Tom, whom I had known before he was killed in action in 1916. Archer had a liberal mind and was a man of deep integrity. I think every one was glad to know that he met with such luck in his last years. The run of his play almost, if not quite, survived him. His large dramatic library went to the British Drama League which Geoffrey Whitworth had founded.

I shall soon have to tell a success story of my own, and here is its background as the year 1923 comes to an end. Archer's legacy of dramatic criticism, coupled with a money legacy from an uncle which nearly equalled my normal year's income, gave me a buoyant feeling of independence. I was close on forty, but until then had never possessed a hundred pounds except on receiving my Army gratuity on demobilization, and that went to furnishing a home. Most writers live as precariously as this ; but I mention it here lest my travels in Europe should have given an impression of ample means. Actually these journeys were always undertaken with a small sum scraped together by saving ; and but for the small inheritance from my uncle I have never to this day owned a penny of unearned capital. This made it all the easier, when earned money came to me in large sums, to subsidize one kind of work by another — for instance to become a theatre director on the earnings of a dramatist or a modest impresario for ballet or opera on those of a



theatre director ; or even again to help pay for productions out of my earnings as a wine merchant allowed to sell good claret or burgundy at a theatre bar. All these things have added to the enjoyment of life, but their material basis has been the enjoyment of writing and nothing else — unless perhaps a wife's enjoyment of the queer task (to my mind) of training and presenting dancers.

Let me come, then, to the beginning of 1924. Flecker's *Hassan* at His Majesty's had trailed an autumn glory over the closing months of 1923, and its success brought new hopes of a drama linking all the arts. This play was too lavishly staged to make it outstandingly a poetic drama. I would like to see it done again with an Elizabethan simplicity, and I am sure Flecker would have understood such a wish, had he lived to see his work on the stage. We were approaching the few short years between two wars when carefree hopes of any kind could be indulged. For some reason I believed in 1924 as in my own star ; and early in the New Year I gave up every sort of other work to begin dramatic writing. Everything, that is to say, but dramatic reviewing for one weekly paper ; for I wanted to keep every possible contact with the stage, to see every new play, and to form ideas about casting and direction.

This also was just the time when *Theatre Arts* changed over from quarterly to monthly publication. From its issue of February 1924 : " We shall look back upon the realistic drama of present commerce as we now look back upon Victorian antimacassars and bunches of wax fruit under glass shades. Realism is not a goal. It was a milestone. . . . Dead conventions encumber a living theatre. Lifeless

## EUROPE REOPENED

---

gestures of lifelike banality fail to arrest the eye. Muffled voices of indisputable good taste fail to enchant the ear. Phantoms eat and drink on the stage, and our bellies are not filled. Phantoms make love, and our pulse beats no jot the faster. Phantoms perish and our withers are unwrung." At which the writer of to-day may say "Well, well" and smile a little ; knowing it all, however, to be true.

## 8

### SUCCESS STORY

**Y**ears before 1914 I had made the plan of a comedy whose motive should be the meeting at an inn of four people, master and man, mistress and maid, and their setting to partners for the night. Put like this, it would be hard to find a more ordinary theme, or one more apt to invite every sort of obvious treatment from the purely cynical to the rosily erotic. My plot allowed for the cross-pairing of lovers in a way that every modern playgoer would expect ; but the choice of partners was to arise from character rather than type. The comedy was imagined as a "costume play" from the start, yet it was meant to break away from prevailing theatre fashions. Producers for instance were talking of Shakespeare in modern dress ; but this was to be modern thought in period setting. Dramatists were putting contemporary slang into historical drama ; but this period play was not to be historical, and its speech, though without any gadzooks, was to fit the dress and the setting. The four personages, destined to play their comedy with a conventional innkeeper and wife for background, were to be four

people like ourselves, born of the social and political revolutions made in the uneasy intervals between wars, and well aware of the inheritance.

Granted the setting to partners as an accomplished fact, man to mistress and master to maid, I wanted to leave to these four the answer to the question, what should happen to them in the morning. Their pairing-off could be either brief or lasting ; either surrendered at the call of social necessity, or broken by mutual disgust, or maintained in the face of the world ; but these were things they would have to decide for themselves, as modern people should. I knew the treatment could be neither wholly cynical nor wholly sensual, remembering how the comedy had first come to mind in those far-off years. The part of the Lady in it was meant to be played by Nora, my friend of the time around 1911, namesake of Ibsen's heroine and daughter of Charles Charrington and Janet Achurch, the pioneers of *A Doll's House*. We had talked of the play from that angle, and I had imagined her stooping beautifully to a manservant whose hard sincerity in love should awaken response in her own sophistication. After Nora's death in 1914 about the time of our joint birthday (she had been five years the younger), the idea of this unwritten comedy lived on sadly, bereft for a while of significance. But as a soldier in France I began sketching out scenes for it in Army notebooks, and by 1919 its outline had acquired almost the pattern of a workable scenario. Now here already was 1924 and the comedy still unwritten, though meanwhile I had been working in the theatre for years, and at thirty-nine had burned the boats of every other sort of profession behind me. It was high time

to begin, as I reflected one spring morning at the outset of a day's walk over the Chiltern Hills, every step of which was to be given to thinking out the composition.

A title for a play, as every dramatist knows, is useful from the start because of its power of suggestion. Climbing over a Chiltern stile with this thought in mind, and perhaps feeling a noonday thirst, I remembered marching in 1915 as a soldier past some roadside alehouse called *The Man with a Load of Mischief*. It may have been either near Cambridge or on the Berkshire downs ; the sign was once not uncommon among English inns, and on the site of Selfridge's Store in Oxford Street such a house had been embellished by Hogarth with a painting of a man "loaded with mischief". Here, anyway, was a title for a comedy ; and it gave me the idea that a manservant (The Man) might be loaded with mischief by his master (The Nobleman) in being bidden to make love to a mistress (The Lady) for her discomfiture, while the master himself should make love to her pert follower (The Maid). In two strides, here was a plot fully elaborated. All that was needful was to link it up with the past of the four chief persons, and leave them to work out their future for themselves. Should the comedy be in verse or prose ? Irregular rhyming verse tempted me greatly, but prose is more difficult and for that reason won the day. For period, the Regency would surely be best ; and if nobody but myself should see the double irony of the title, the loading of mischief upon a man for his master's ends, no harm would be done. Everyone would see the irony of the man already in love with a woman commanded to make a pretence of wooing her ; for that is one of the

classic though rare motives of comedy. Everyone would taste the bitterness of the manservant next morning, when his noble master yawns over breakfast and laments the fleeting character of carnal pleasure. Dialogue began to run through my head, something this way :

*Nobleman* : Sympathy, remember. Speak of me — none too kindly, for she hates me.

*Man* : I will not speak ill of your lordship.

*Nobleman* : Have no scruples. Say your worst.

*Man* : Servants often speak ill of their masters. I think that is not the way to my lady's confidence.

*Nobleman* : A nice point. Yes, you have the finer touch.

*Man* : I would rather rely on my own merits than your lordship's shortcomings.

And so it is that plays contrive to get themselves written, after maturing sometimes through years of personal experience and emotional impulse to which a technical understanding of the writer's craft is more or less unconsciously added. Being built of all these things my comedy sailed perhaps into deeper waters than I had meant to navigate in the beginning. Before half an act was finished, the ending was already determined by the need of making the love of a man and woman the motive of an action where all else was masquerade. The play became liable to be called romantic, although the lovers sought nothing but reality in themselves and one another. It varied from the plane of high comedy to that of the comedy of feeling ; which in turn made it none too easy a play for the actor and actress confronted by one realist obstacle after another to be taken in the stride of their emotional perception.

*The Man with a Load of Mischief* found a publisher at once,

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

and ran into several impressions as a reading play before it was seriously considered for the stage. During the summer of 1924 the script had been shown to three or four London producing managers all of whom said there was not a penny in it; which opinion I entirely shared. Nigel Playfair, however, offered to arrange some matinee performances at his theatre in Hammersmith if he could get the right cast, and Norman Macdermott at the Everyman was willing to face ruin by giving the play an evening run. I preferred to hand it to the Stage Society — a step which gave it the final stamp of highbrow non-commercialism but at the same time offered the hope of first-rate casting if it should ever be produced. The Society announced it as the first production of the season 1924-25; and when I modestly suggested that Fay Compton and Leon Quartermaine should be asked to play in it they astonished us all by accepting immediately. Fay Compton was afterwards obliged through other rehearsals to give up her part; but we went forward with a good cast, luckily small enough to enable us to afford the scene and costumes designed by Aubrey Hammond, which gave a distinction hitherto unknown to a Sunday evening play production. Another motive for this little extravagance was an American offer received for the play during its rehearsal weeks; the advance royalties were promptly spent in setting it forth to advantage.

Meantime I had also to rehearse *No Man's Land*, which the St. Martin's management had commissioned me to translate from *La Terre Inhumaine* by François de Curel. This was the work of a notable French dramatist who hitherto had been played only by the Stage Society in Eng-

land ; and the most I hoped for was that his play should have a run, whilst my comedy perhaps might score a success of esteem. Actually *No Man's Land* was a failure not from its own fault but from casting and other causes. *The Man with a Load of Mischief* after its two Stage Society performances, was acquired by Frederick Harrison for the Haymarket, where it was presented the following summer, June 1925, and began a first run of eight months. The theatre was more or less sold out for the rest of the London season ; and thanks to the contract which had been offered me by the courtly old manager, the last of his line in the West End, I found myself suddenly with an income of close on a thousand pounds a month, more than I would normally require in a year. It was all very surprising, and rather like winning a Derby Sweep by one's own exertions if that were possible. I tried to live up to the part of successful playwright, visiting the theatre now and then and giving little supper-parties ; but in fact I made few contacts with the new world in which I found myself, even though total strangers wrote and asked me to their homes. On the other hand I fell in the estimation of highbrow friends, who were accustomed to argue that West End success and triviality were one and the same, and felt that I must have been writing down deliberately to the public. I cannot say this troubled me much. Of that summer when the play was done, I seem best to remember a day spent in walking to and from Ascot races through Windsor Great Park, and lunching out among the gipsies and bookies on the far side of the course. I regarded the men of fashion in grey top-hats and their ladies in picture-frocks with quite a new interest, knowing that



## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

most of them would go to see my comedy because it was the thing to see, and hoping that some of them might even like it. The only visible connection of Ascot with the theatre was the name of Lord Howard de Walden, a patron who had once enabled Herbert Trench to put on plays by Maeterlinck and others at the Haymarket. One of his horses, the race-card told me, was running in the next race; and sure enough there it was, with a jockey in apricot, cantering to the starting-post. The tip was altogether too good to miss, and I enriched myself a little more by the victory of a fantastic outsider. After this, it was sensible to reflect again on luck in the theatre, and the overwhelming part it plays. Where would my comedy have been without Fay Compton and Leon Quartermaine and Frank Cellier, backed by the authority of the Haymarket? A title in the archives of a Sunday evening play society, at the very best.

The problem of continuing to write for such a medium of expression, as an independent author submitting his work for the approval of a producing manager, was sufficiently complicated. As an old dramatic critic I knew how few playwrights register more than one or two hits, even though they give their whole lives to the business. I knew also that what I really needed was to work in the theatre with a group of artists, actors and directors and craftsmen, and to write for them, sometimes at my own suggestion, sometimes at theirs, without surrendering that absolute creative freedom of the study which is the dramatist's right. There was nothing new about this idea, indeed all Elizabethan drama had come into being by such means. Creative directors in our own time had tried, and were still trying, to broaden the

basis of theatre so that the stage should not merely translate the realist picture in the playwright's mind into realist fact and furniture. But I questioned very much, and still question, whether it is possible to form such a creative group under satisfactory conditions in the existing proscenium theatre and with existing players whose style is already formed. One would probably need not only dramatic schools and workshops of a new type, but also playhouses differently constructed and proportioned, with a new relation between stage and auditorium to embody the new theatre conception. The more photographic reproduction of a dramatist's or director's picture could be left to the screen. Failing any such movement in our theatre of 1925, which was imagined to be solely the dramatist's mouthpiece and instrument, I could only go on trying to bring it into effective being ; but it was an advantage to back my opinion with the freedom of a practising playwright, as well as the experience. As royalties continued to pour in, I began to think of theatre management and direction.

This modest success, which had not otherwise changed my way of life, gave me the chance of a first visit to America. Aubrey Hammond and I sailed in the old *Celtic* in September 1925, with a vast crowd of returning tourists of those days. Ostensibly we were going to see the New York production of my comedy with Ruth Chatterton and Robert Loraine, but really we meant to learn something more about the world than we knew already. We were innocent enough of the Atlantic to imagine that this aged liner, in which as first-class passengers we slept above each other's heads, represented the normal comfort of ocean travel. As we

arrived at the pier, it was cheering to see the yellow covers of *Theatre Arts* waving above the heads of the crowd, and to know that we were among friends, most of whom we met for the first time. We lived at the Algonquin and lunched with the dramatic critics, who welcomed us with the kindness always extended to children escaped from Europe. We visited Toronto and Atlantic City during the out-of-town tour of the comedy (I shall always cherish the memory of the Boardwalk and the Heinz pier), and we behaved neither more nor less unwisely than other newcomers to Broadway and its life. I cannot say that Broadway and Shaftesbury Avenue seemed to me essentially different: in both of them I met numbers of producers, directors and players whose main interest was the stage, while my own interest was the theatre. Noel Coward was there with *The Vortex*, which I had liked very well a year earlier in London; and among the actors was Herbert Marshall, who had played in *The Machine-Wreckers* for the Stage Society. As for my own comedy, I had registered a private vow in mid-Atlantic that any money made by it in America should be devoted to subverting and otherwise destroying the theatre as we know it in the West End of London and elsewhere. The theatre does not forget such vows, and knows how to defend itself. The comedy failed after a few weeks, though I remained to pay for my seats at other people's plays and to meet writers for the theatre and critics, among whom were Sidney Howard, Stark Young and John Mason Brown. The visit had been a stimulating adventure, and I could have forecast at that time the arrival of the American dramatists in Britain and their

conquest of our stage in the years between 1935 and 1940. Just before beginning the homeward journey I was able to accept a cabled offer of the Home University Library to write their book on *Drama*, which occupied me on the boat and for months afterwards.

The ambition of a dramatist is generally to go on writing plays, each as successful as possible, and to draw royalties upon them until eventually the copyrights become extinguished by the passage of time, both on the professional and amateur stage. I share this ambition to the full ; and in this year 1941 I am still earning a small income from copyrights created in the early nineteen-twenties. But the casualties in such a career are heavy ; and when I think of the months spent in writing and rewriting plays never to be performed or maybe to receive one or two fugitive presentations only, the perennial hope in the dramatist's mind seems to be the chief marvel of his profession. Among the full-length plays I wrote in the years following 1925 were *The Song of Drums* or *Ulenspiegel*, which managed to get itself performed in the Royal Flemish Theatre at Brussels but not in London ; *The Fountain-Head*, which had a short run in a club theatre ; *One More River*, given successively by the Stage Society, Cambridge Festival and Gate ; and *Matchmaker's Arms* or *House of Assignment*, played in different versions by Sybil Thorndike and at the Mercury. The first and last of these were more or less based on picaresque masterpieces in narrative, the *Légende* of Charles de Coster and the *Celestina* of Fernando de Rojas respectively. There were also the many adaptations commissioned for me by producing managers in England and America, nearly twenty of them in all. Most

of them reached the stage and ran for various periods from a fortnight to a year, whilst others were gradually forgotten by the men who had commissioned them, and still lie somewhere in the dusty files of theatre offices. None of this was hack-work in the ordinary sense, for I declined every play or subject that would not give me pleasure in the writing ; but much of it was work done in the spirit of the Elizabethan play-craftsman for a kind of theatre almost unknown in our time. The plays that succeeded owed their success, as I had owed a great deal of mine with the Haymarket comedy, to outstanding personalities in the cast ; and those that failed were mostly overladen with scenery or costume or some other element inimical to the effect of the spoken word. Had I been given a free choice I would have had none of this dramatic work performed on a proscenium stage, but on a platform stage resembling that of the Florentine or English Renaissance. And although these notions may seem queer to the reader familiar with one type of theatre architecture only, they are based on the experience of a practical playwright who has always had one foot at least firmly planted on the commercial stage.

This has been a very personal chapter, for which I make no apologies. Needless to say, many things happened in our London theatre of 1924-25 beside *The Man with a Load*. To this time belong *Saint Joan*, *Our Betters*, the rise of Noel Coward, the appearance of the Chauve-Souris, Stark Young's *The Colonnade* at the Stage Society, *The Emperor Jones* and many other lively happenings. The General Strike, that strangest of social and economic phenomena, was still before us. The world had not yet embarked upon

## SUCCESS STORY

---

the orgy of confident speculation that succeeded Locarno and was so abruptly ended in 1929-30. We had not reached midway in the passage between our wars, and the swell of optimism was still evident, even though it might forecast heavy seas. Most of Europe was quiet too ; and to the reflection of this mood in Continental drama I shall come very soon. The spring of 1926 found me free to come and go in any country or continent, to write or cease from writing as I pleased, and indeed to engage in the world spectacle either as player or spectator. No man of forty-one could have desired a greater liberty than this, or have been more resolved (I hope) to make use of it.

## 9

### SCREEN REFLECTIONS

As a dramatist I came into the theatre just too soon to be concerned with the movies through the presentation of current plays. In 1925 a successful play was not necessarily screened, though the author always liked to sell his picture rights and looked on the sum he received as a gift from the gods. In the writing of its drama the screen even had a tendency, until about 1930, to move away from the stage, however many actors and directors it borrowed from the theatre. Highbrow film critics were loud in praise of this independent spirit shown by the youthful art of the picture, and they wrote copious (though now forgotten) articles and books to show that the screen would never follow the example of the despised stage by using words, but would rely on its own supreme power of visual imagery. The more would-be prophetic of these writers added that the screen would never become coloured or stereoscopic — never any of the things that it was bound to become from its nature as a scientific invention capable of reproducing the creations of art. Then, suddenly, the arrival of the talking

picture confounded them as much as it amazed and delighted a public which had never considered highbrow theories of screen art. The movement away from the stage was reversed overnight, and the playwright as well as the actor and director became useful to the producing corporations.

I confess to having watched this comedy of confusions with ironical pleasure, for all my friends who had any feeling about the movies were obstinate addicts of the silent picture, and when the first talkie appeared they found themselves obliged to predict the ruin of the whole art and industry. It never seemed to me possible that they could be right ; and the lapse of only a few years has shown the absurdity of forming such rigid ideas about an expressive medium new in the world's history. To-day we all see that a good picture can be the better for good dialogue ; which means that words have taken a vital place in the composition and are themselves one of the images of screen. Maybe to-morrow we shall see colour and stereoscopy assume a place just as important ; that is unless the whole process of photography on celluloid and projection by light is meanwhile made obsolete, as it is likely to be, by radio-television. (The broadcast play "performed" by a reading party was on the point of being superseded by the televised play when war conditions interrupted visual radio in all countries.) Whatever the scientific development may be, the values of direction, acting and the spoken word will remain ; and I put them in that order because it is the present order of importance in a picture. One of the interesting possibilities of television is that the author may come first and the director second or third ; but that has not happened yet, and for the



present one should regard the director who controls every detail of presentation as the real author of a picture.

These are the reflections of a theatre man without any prejudice against the new art form of the machine age. Let dotards talk of the characters of the screen as "shadows": they can be much more real than the personages of many plays. Let sentimentalists revel in the thought that a stage performance is freshly created each evening before a living audience capable of spontaneous response: the talking picture now evokes just the same warmth of laughter or emotion, and its scenes may well be better acted. When a stage critic wrote of a play of mine that, thank God, here was something nobody could make into a movie, I was obliged to him for his amiable intention but not so pleased with the value he put on film rights that I would gladly have sold. To-day if a critic said as much he could be sued for damages; but this was before the talking picture, as aesthetic rival of the stage play, had come into the field. After a brief period of pictures with noise effects, to which belonged the screen play of *The Patriot*, the talkie established itself in a single season; and like most authors I stood looking curiously at the new dramatic medium and wondering whether to try working in it or not. The decision depended on age and temperament as well as opportunity. From 1930 onward I noticed that very few of my seniors among dramatists, men in or nearing their fifties, were taking the screen seriously enough to write for it themselves; although eventually Shaw broke all rules as usual by becoming an octogenarian screen dramatist. Popular playwrights went to Hollywood because it was made worth their while;

Maugham and Galsworthy let others do the writing for them when their plays were screened at all. On the other hand, practically all my juniors among dramatists were as closely bound to the screen as to the stage; and some of them gave up stage writing altogether. My own policy was to take any work that offered, whether theatre or film or radio, if it looked interesting in itself and required a writer's hand. The result was that in the ten years following a stage success, my earnings from the screen were perhaps a tenth or a twentieth of those from the theatre; but they have been just enough to give an impression of the screen world from within and add to a knowledge of the world at large.

Yes, I have visited the dramatists of Hollywood in their tidy little offices at the studios, where they clock in and out at fixed hours and deal in rotation with scripts laid on their desks. I have driven my car through the gates of the less glamorous English film factories with their architecture of the corrugated-iron period, and drunk those endless cups of coffee which accompany waiting on somebody else's time, and seen the processions, sad in their different ways, of the principals and the supers; and watched shooting on the floor and cutting in the cutting-room which should be called an operating theatre. I have taken part in those solemn but extremely funny conferences at which the story of a picture is overhauled dramatically and psychologically by an assembly of script writers, continuity men, technicians, directors and their assistants, presided over by some hard-boiled head of a producing corporation with constant reference to his own administrative staff and a stray capitalist

or two from his financial board. I have seen a picture go from bad to worse in tale and dialogue before a photographer was ever let loose upon it : I have climbed the crazy structure of sets that had cost a fortune but were never to be used at all because the scenes they represented had vanished from the script : I have heard fact after fact about some fantastic fiction verified from an encyclopaedia : I have known distinguished stage artists cross-examined about their capacities and careers by people who had never heard of them, and classified in order of merit by the salaries they asked. And months after the job was over, I have attended the preview of a picture which bore practically no relation to the script from which it arose, and marvelled at its score of industrious and individually intelligent authors as they stood in line at the refreshment buffet.

All these things are commonplaces of a studio system which some playwrights with longer knowledge have had the wit or cruelty to make into comedies for the stage. They represent the inevitable follies and errors of an industry that sets out to appeal to millions, and has been guided since its cradle by the timid mentality of the men who financed it into being. Fear governs the manufacturers of the screen as much as hope governs its artists ; and when these motives are inverted in the hope of gain and the fear of failure, the industry reproduces in a grotesque and magnified shape the anxieties that have always haunted the imagination of the entertainment world.

The screen itself as a dramatic medium not only outlives ridicule already, but makes the ridiculer frankly ridiculous. It is in practice the theatre of youth, and in geographical fact

the theatre of multitudes who will never know any other. Already in the great capitals it sets a standard that the living stage must equal or excel. Ten years ago in London or New York one could look through the theatre list and classify the plays in two groups. The first group, with most of the current thrillers and comedies and the like, could be as well done by the screen if it chose, with its new gift of words, to undertake them. The second group, having some special intellectual or poetic appeal, seemed to be marked out for the stage alone. But in that short space of ten years the position of the groups has been entirely changed. The first is threatened with total extinction by the screen, which not only presents realistic drama and realistic playing as well as the stage but a good deal better. The second has to compete with pictures of distinction and subtlety forecasting a poetry of the screen, as well as with pictures of comic genius that all the cultivated world runs to see. Such is the stride that has been taken between 1931 and 1941; and again I record it as a theatre man who has been able to turn screen spectator with an open mind.

Three years ago on a winter evening I saw the first performance on any stage of Thornton's Wilder's *Our Town*, played in a Boston theatre before a half-filled house. It was a sensitive play well acted, which after the doubtful week of its opening went to New York and became the Broadway hit of the year. Early this year (1941) the screen picture *Our Town* came to London, and I liked it better even than the original from which Wilder had written it. The reason was that the no-scenery stage convention on which the performance had been based seemed to me insufficiently

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

related to the deep feeling of the work. I was always conscious of the theatre radiators standing there at the back of the stage. When the screen offered a background varied enough in plane and conception to give all the characters their right setting, I was able not only to see the drama more clearly but also to listen better to the words which the author had beautifully conceived and timed (I do not think of them as being "written") before the director came in with his technical craft to give them full effect. What had originally been rather an austere New England tale now seemed to gain an Elizabethan quality of richness. I saw in the whole presentation a counterpart of the method of those old Spanish romancers like Fernando de Rojas who, long before the rise of classical Spanish or Elizabethan drama, sent their characters talking from house to house and street to street in snatches of vivid dialogue without narrative, which were never meant to be spoken from a stage but only visualized as they were read. The screen now gives opportunity for the making of drama out of such passages of speech in movements from place to place; and this opens a brave new world to the understanding dramatist, who need not be a dramatist of the stage at all but must be a man of simple imagination, like Wilder himself.

At the same time a new call is made upon the seeing and listening power of the spectator, who will not easily appreciate the Chekhovs of the new screen any more than playgoers at first appreciated the Chekhov of the stage. The call is not made upon the spectator's intellect, his capacity for example to follow the argument of a Shaw who will explain everything in heaven and earth and human history; but

upon his sensibility and range of vision. And viewed in this way, the new art of the screen looks uncommonly like the collective art of the theatre, made up of the collaboration of dramatist and director and designer, which we have long been seeking to establish in its due place on our stage. There is in fact no difference between them but the physical medium they employ ; and if theatre art has met with set-backs in this decade, most of them have been due to the movement of its own creative directors from the stage to the screen which offers them greater scope and greater rewards together.

When dramatic history comes to be written we may be envied as people who, in a time of major wars and other world convulsions, made discoveries of mind and imagination as surely based on scientific knowledge as the discoveries of Renaissance man were based on voyages and expanding horizons. The silent picture was one of them, the talking picture another, and radio-television is assuredly a third. And how blind would be a playwright and producer of plays, telling of his journey through theatre in this time, if he could not comprehend such things. He might well appear to posterity like a Rosencrantz or Guildenstern complacently content with his own part in *Hamlet*, and unaware of the significance of the Prince of Denmark on the stage. So for this good reason, if for no other, I am glad to pause and envisage the career of the movies, looking backward a little but more especially forward along their cometary and predictable path.

## IO

### EUROPE AGAIN

About Easter 1926, having finished my little book on *Drama*, rewritten one new play and begun another, I set off for Vienna with the reasonable excuse that *The Man with a Load of Mischief* had been accepted by the Burgtheater and the director wanted to discuss with me the German version and some details of production. For my part, I wanted to see what the city looked like after twenty years ; and why should a writer, who can work anywhere, seek an excuse for a journey in Europe at the most delightful season ? In April the first- and second-class coaches of the international trains are empty, except for an officer here or there, a pretty woman, or a factory owner who looks just the same whether he be French, Swiss, German or Austrian. The third class, which is hard sitting but more fun, is full of migratory priests, peasants, doctors and small tradesmen. Except for the varied wines of the restaurant car, frontiers pass almost unnoticed ; though one may have to pull a suitcase off the rack for some pretence of customs inspection, or get out to buy some new sort of money from a bank official at a

station. Why, you may ask, write of such things in the present when they are so evidently of the past ? The answer is that they are real while the Europe of to-day is a transient nightmare. Freedom to move about our Continent is a right and a heritage, like the freedom to move about England and America. To feel this is to travel and not to be a tourist.

The Alps, seen from the window on this spring journey, overawed me into feeling that at forty-one my mountain days must be over ; which in fact was far from true. Ten years later I could take a glacier peak in a day's stride from the valley level, and be none the worse for it. The capacity for physical endurance, with the pleasure that it brings, is not to be suppressed by a few years of sedentary habit.

In Vienna, the director of the Burg showed me what I had wished for many years to see, the organization of a great middle-European playhouse in mid-season, with a bill of five to seven different plays each week. The acting company under contract numbered at least thirty, and the stage workers as many more. Counting all employees in the front of the house, the weekly pay-roll included not less than 140 people. This was perhaps not excessive for a theatre seating about 2000 and maintaining the largest repertory in Europe ; but it was impressive that such an organization should have survived the disappearance of the monarchy and aristocracy, the inflation and all the other ills of Austria. State support was one obvious reason, but another was to be found in the solidity of the institution itself. The young Viennese might call it a museum of antiquities and modernities, but in fact the Burg, more than



## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

any other playhouse in the world, stood for authority in drama, playing and direction. To give Shakespeare and Molière, Goethe and Schiller and Lessing, Scribe and Sardou and Ibsen, under one roof and with the same company, was something that even the Comédie Française had never set out to do. The vast stage could harbour in its wings all the scenery required for a week of current plays. The wardrobes, workshops and paintrooms functioned with traditional efficiency. The public functioned just as thoroughly at the box office, crowding to the seven o'clock performance from their cafés and going afterwards to dine and talk at leisure of the play.

With the Burg was associated the small Akademietheater in the modern city outside the Ring, and the two houses bore the same relation to each other as the Kammerspiele to the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. To some extent this solved the problem of presenting the modern intimate play, which was liable to be travestied by the grand manner and sweeping gestures of the Burg stage. I would have liked my comedy to be done at the Akademie; but the translator was to be Felix Salten, author of *Bambi*, and his preference for a Burg production was bound eventually to decide the matter. Meanwhile I was able to see typical productions of *Minna von Barnhelm* and other classics at the Burg, and of Molnar, Wilde and Strindberg on the smaller stage.

In Salten's home, which was full of hunting trophies, I met Max Reinhardt for the first time. The Professor, a man of great zest and vitality, was in the midst of his second main productive period during which he controlled four theatres in Berlin, the Viennese Theater in der Josefstadt, and the

dramatic side of the yearly Salzburg Festival. I believe the success of this huge enterprise was equally due to the acumen of his brother Emanuel and the ability of his chosen directors. With Reinhardt was Helene Thimig, who was afterwards to be his wife, and came of the gifted acting family whose head was Hugo Thimig. In life this actress gave an impression of shy and even awkward domesticity, by contrast with her rich and confident stage presence. Seeing her standing in the wings with a couple of hot sausages for Reinhardt's lunch, or at the top of the stairway in the candle-lit castle of Leopoldskron where she received an array of international guests, one would never have taken her for the distinguished artist that she was and is. At this time in Vienna she was appearing in *Kabale und Liebe* and in Hofmannsthal's *Christina's Heimreise*. She remains my brightest recollection of the Theater in der Josefstadt, even brighter than that of the crystal chandelier, one of the largest in captivity, which illuminated the house from a low level and was raised to the ceiling just before the curtain rose. Looking at it one realized how notable a part the chandelier had played in the theatre of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The leader of the Paris *claque* formerly sat below it to conduct his orchestra of applause given forth by hand-clappers in the balconies, and was therefore called *le chevalier du lustre*. Further back in history this refulgent object was a hang-over, in the best sense, from the theatre of the Court and ballroom.

Less mannered, but as pleasing a link with the past, was the Theater an der Wien, the old home of operetta which had echoed in its time so much light music, and in our day had seen all the premières of Strauss and Lehar. It was

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

always said that the best place to listen was the topmost gallery, and accordingly I climbed a wooden spiral staircase to some fantastic perch, where I heard *Die Zirkusprincessin* without seeing too much of its tawdry costumes and setting. One would never have believed oneself to be at the creative source of musical comedy, that flourishing international business (if not racket) of the first quarter of this century. Visits to clever cabarets, some political and all free-spoken, completed the round of Vienna. My play was now scheduled for the opening of the Burg season, 1927-28, and in May I left for Paris as delegate to an international theatre congress. It was a preliminary gathering of the Société Universelle du Théâtre formed by that true idealist, Firmin Gémier of the Odéon ; but associated with it was a meeting of dramatic and musical critics from various countries.

Gémier believed it possible to form an international theatre society, under whose auspices festivals should be given in turn, during the regular season, in the capitals of Europe, America and perhaps Asia. A permanent bureau was to be established in Paris to carry out this plan, and to form archives of theatre information and reference, to which members of the society and students should have access. Theatre men of a number of countries promised their support, and eventually a beginning was made a year later with the appearance in the French capital of Dutch, Flemish and Japanese companies playing in their own language, and of Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson's English company in *Saint Joan* and the *Medea*.

Theatre congresses seldom accomplish as much as this, and in the season they can never be quite representative ;

but when held in Paris they can be very pleasant. This was the time when the theatrical left wing, under such directors as Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet and Georges Pitoëff, was beginning its notable work in little playhouses off the boulevards. Here was an opportunity of meeting them and their own group of dramatists, men like Jules Romains, Lenormand, Denys Amiel, Jean-Jacques Bernard and Simon Gantillon. My friendly acquaintances of those days led later to translations, and to the making of contacts between French writers and the Gate, the newly-founded Cambridge Festival Theatre, and other professional little theatres springing up in England. Each evening we went to a play in parties, and by day we were enlivened at the conference table by the interventions of Tristan Bernard, the far from serious parent of the serious Jean-Jacques — a bearded, Rabelaisian and almost legendary Parisian figure who came to help us along. I cannot remember that any of the new plays were so impressive as Henry Becque's *Les Corbeaux*, a classic of 1882 which was just then being superbly played at the Comédie Française. This was freely admitted by the dramatists of 1926 themselves. Becque's play, written just before the more accomplished *La Parisienne*, had been in the repertory at intervals ever since its first production; and it will surely remain there for generations more.

Other distractions of a Paris international congress always include an official morning reception at the Hôtel de Ville, where the Prefect of the Seine Department reads the delegates an address, and the invited guests, Parisians who have acquired the privilege by hereditary or other means,

afterwards storm the buffet to drink sweet champagne. There is also the official banquet, held in one of the larger restaurants of the Champs-Élysées, where Mlle. Cécile Sorel makes one of her perennial appearances and a Minister proposes the toast of art, declaring without fail, though with little justification but political sentiment, that "L'Art ne connaît pas de frontières". There is the afternoon reception in the grounds of the Élysée itself, where, weather permitting, the official photograph is taken after all features have been artistically composed. And if any delegate, after a week of this, does not feel that he would willingly do it all again next year, he is no true traveller and no student of human nature. I should add that the French Government makes a yearly grant in aid of such occasions, and its hospitality puts all others to shame.

Returning home by way of Dover, I found the quay lined with trim Oxford undergraduates in pullovers ready to berth and unload the steamboat. The General Strike had already lasted some days, but long before reaching London one knew that it had been broken by such volunteers, whom nobody even called blacklegs. It dragged on hopelessly a few days longer — the workers standing by quietly to watch their jobs being done by the nation at large — and then collapsed. The affair had been very un-Continental and a complete disproof of all syndicalist theories ; but it was as epochal in its own way as the Wall Street crash two or three years later. Our world, already in the grip of mechanical forces, had made a violent, improbable, frustrated gesture. Nothing could ever be the same again, for the unexpected was bound to happen socially, politically, internationally.

A logical observer might even have forecast at this stage the arming of the charlatan dictators and their exploitation of the universal economic ill for national ends.

The actual momentary crisis passed, and we said complacently that England was herself again : this complacency was not to be rudely disturbed until the hour of the Abdication. Theatres reopened as the other wheels of life resumed their turning ; and this was not a bad year for the London stage, including as it did a series of Chekhov revivals under the direction of Theodore Komisarjevsky, O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* which confirmed him the rank of the best Irish writer since Synge, the positive English success of an American dramatist in Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted*, and among the rest *Berkeley Square*. Sacha Guitry, as guest artist, made a fashionable hit with the very slight *Mozart*, made and tailored for Yvonne Printemps. The Ballets Russes had renewed their summer visits to Covent Garden. I was amusing myself by writing a modern comedy in verse, intended to parody the plot and characters of the drawing-room dramatists ; and this sufficed to bridge the gap between early and late summer, when it was time to pay a first visit to the Salzburg Festival. This, in fact, was to be a year of travel.

To-day there is nothing new to be said of the *Festspiele* in the town on the rushing river Salzach, or of its rain and sunshine, laughter and Mozartian sentiment, social snobs and music-lovers, peasants and *Wandervögel* and Fritz Massary, Max Pallenberg and Moissi, *Mozartserenaden* and *Café Bazar*. All this formed one of the bright recurrent episodes of the inter-war years ; and if the glamour was a

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

little unreal, that was excused by its intentional theatricality. I shall not write of any year in particular, even though 1926 in my experience was in many ways the best ; but the few things I have to say are to be taken as a friendly critique of Salzburg in general. The association of music and drama was never wholly satisfying, for the musical ascendancy was always marked, and Reinhardt seemed content that it should be so. At one time he had perhaps meant to make new productions at the Festival, and this would have given it a world-importance from the theatre standpoint ; but with the exception of the *Everyman* played in the setting of the baroque cathedral square, all the plays of the earlier years were revivals transferred from Berlin or Vienna, either to the small stage of the Stadttheater or the larger one in the ill-shapen and rather forbidding Festspielhaus. Reinhardt then became interested architecturally in the possibilities of the old summer riding-school of the archepiscopal palace. He transformed it into an open-air playhouse by making its arcaded galleries into a group of stages ; and here some years later I saw the unlucky production of *Faust*.

Carlo Gozzi's *Turandot*, *Princess of China* was the dramatic highlight of 1926 and the following year. In Karl Vollmöller's version it was not quite the play that the Venetian dramatist had intended, but it was a good reconstruction in the spirit of the old Italian Comedy, with some clowning on the foreground of the stage. The prevailing humours were of the Berliner type ; for instance Pallenberg's "I am the Chief Eunuch : the office is hereditary in our family". Technically, the use of hangings in place of painted sets, and the manifold entries through the auditorium, showed

that Reinhardt had lost none of his skill since the time of *Sumurun*. And in Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters*, remade in the spirit of Viennese popular farce, he could accomplish miracles of illusion with a couple of screens and the comedians of the Thimig family. For at least two years in Salzburg we had access to rehearsals ; and I say " we " because my wife had much to do with the privilege. We sat in the stalls of the Festspielhaus hearing the chuckles with which Reinhardt expressed his relish and encouraged his comedians; and we attended the various receptions, at one of which I had the felicity of seeing the Professor kiss the Archbishop's ring. Nor should one forget the surprise of seeing Dr. Kommer, so dapper and inevitable a figure at first nights in London or Paris or New York, in the *Lederhosen* of the Alpine countryside.

When that year's Festival was over I remained alone in Austria, and found my way to a high village of the Salzkammergut, which can be nameless because it has nothing to do with theatre. Here I was to begin a new life of summer seasons, on mountains and in valleys, with and without the car which made the place in later years so accessible both from England and Italy. The work done in this retreat — and I cannot think of a holiday without writing — was the happiest of each year. Since I was lucky enough, that September, to strike a cloudless month, I had much high walking from hut to hut of the German Alpine Club around 8000 to 9000 feet, and good companionship among the Austrians up there, all of us singing at dusk, sleeping at nightfall and rising before dawn. Then, coming back to the valley, I found a cable offering me the com-



mission to translate Guitry's *Mozart* into English verses for the music of Reynaldo Hahn. I accepted because I happened to be out there, and felt the rhyming task would amuse me in the open, at café tables under the red canopies that dotted the green hillside. The version was finished in a fortnight, and having mailed it to New York (where I fear its run was brief) I felt rich enough to leave for Venice, which was no great way off by the railroad through Carinthia. In the Dolomites, the great cliffs of the Marmolada could be seen in a clear evening sky.

Perhaps it is well that a first visit to Venice should be made by a man alone. I know all the romantic glamour of the place, the evenings out on the lagoons, the mornings in cool churches and galleries, the afternoons (if you must have them) on the Lido, and even the wanderings arm-in-arm through the narrow alleys of the city by land ; but the mind needs no distraction when you reach the station after midnight on a journey from the north, and embark on your very first gondola, baggage and all, to proceed down the Grand Canal to the water-front. Then the crystal-harsh cry of the gondolier as he turns the corner of some alley is at its clearest : then the stars are at their loveliest even though the mosquitoes are at their most voracious. I had not long arrived in Venice, and indeed was only walking at noon next day under the arches of the Piazza near Florian's, when I met the linen-clad chairman of the Stage Society and his lady, who rented every year a Venetian palace, and with it a pair of the most admirable gondoliers I could ever hope to see, clad in steely silk which matched the sheen of their burnished prow, the product of hours of work begun at

dawn each morning. My friends introduced me forthwith to a luncheon of *scampi*, the Dublin Bay prawns or New Orleans prawns or what you will of the Adriatic. When they placed their equipage at my disposal, complete with silken canopy and gondoliers, to be paddled from church to church and gallery to gallery, I would not have envied Casanova himself. My first voyage, however, was to the Piombi, that dark prison whence the great Venetian adventurer made his escape ; I felt that the numerous Madonnas, and even the Colleoni statue, could wait upon this pious pilgrimage. After dark there was music in the palace of my host and hostess, until the hour when I was ferried to my hotel by those two fierce Mussolini-haters, my gondoliers ; and thus it was that September, still cloudless, declined into October beckoning me home.

As sequel to this journey, which by now had become rather fantastic in its pleasurable nature, I could think of nothing better to do than to travel westward by Monte Carlo, where at the tables in the warmth of a Mediterranean midnight I met an old friend, a horseman of Allenby's campaigns, wandering from room to room with a handful of counters. We mutually confessed that gaming bored us, and agreed to play chess. In the early hours, therefore, we resorted to the café over the way from the Casino and demanded a board and men. The waiter consulted his chief, who consulted the manager, who in turn consulted one of those resplendent beings in cocked hats who represent the law in Monaco. It was finally decided that we were either sane or harmless, so that the board and men were fetched from somewhere. The game, played *al fresco* until

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

three in the morning, attracted much attention. The reason was that on the only previous occasion when chess was played there, a Pole who had borne his losses at roulette with apparent resignation had drawn a revolver and shot himself on losing a chess game to a compatriot. We said, justly, that Englishmen are not Poles. Next day we walked together over the hills above Monte Carlo, and through La Turbie, where the mothers threaten their troublesome sons that if they are naughty they will not be *croupiers* when they grow up. Then, having eaten ripe figs from the trees of this Roman place of execution, we descended and took train for Marseilles, Paris and London.

Considering critically the mood of fifteen years ago, I now find in it undeniable traces of what the left wing would call "bourgeois escapism". Yes, Austria was the escapist country for many years between the wars, and Venice has always been the escapist city and the Mediterranean the escapist sea. But I have never liked any of them for that reason only, or mainly ; and now that the mood is past and only the tale remains, let us grant that they have their own place in the theatrical picture of the time.

## II

### FROM THE ORIGINAL

THE producing managers of Shaftesbury Avenue and Broadway, aware of the risks of following their own judgment where not more than one play in ten may be a hit, have always cast an eye around the horizon for the appearance of a foreign success in Paris, Berlin, Prague or Budapest — but Budapest especially. The magic of that city's name is such that one of our dramatists has been known to attribute a play of his own to a fictitious Hungarian author, and then by posing as its adaptor to get it produced for a run ; and afterwards even to sell the rights to a Middle Europe innocent of the affair but eager to buy an Anglo-Saxon hit. For it is not only in London or New York that the perennial quest for somebody else's work goes on. A German or Austrian *Verlag*, which takes control of a dramatist and arranges his multiple productions at a commission of 50 per cent, brings out its seasonal list of English-American plays, commended in a style which makes all our poor geese appear swans, as the geese of the Molnars and Vajdas appear when they too are trussed and exposed in the international play market.

But in this matter the theatre lives up to its traditions as well as its commercial instincts. Many Elizabethan masterpieces are free adaptations written by various or successive hands ; and Molière did not scruple to borrow from the Italian Comedy or anything else that was handy ; and original plots in Restoration drama are conspicuously few ; and actually all historical and most classical drama is a variant of some original theme, so that the playgoer who has seen, say, *Hamlet*, and *Mourning Becomes Electra* and read a play or two by Sophocles, may well wonder whether there exists more than one fabulous and supreme tragic subject, that of guilty parents and their children on whom the burden descends — a myth which seems to form the source of manifold streams in man's imagination. It is certain that the dramatist's own impulse has more to do with "adaptation" than the interest of a producing manager, however strong it may be, to exploit a current success. For the dramatist is locked in an age-long struggle to preserve the fabric erected by dramatic thought ; and the renewal of this structure, which has become a common possession, is more important than what is called, lightly, the individual writer's "originality". This is a longer way of saying that it is the treatment and not the subject that counts ; but perhaps it is well to stress the adapter's place in theatre history. When a modern French playwright names his comedy *Amphitryon* 38 he is gracefully acknowledging the existence of 37 previous versions of the same tale, some better than his and some worse, but all with the same beginning and end. The number might be trebled if account were taken of all the derivatives of the *Menechmi* of Plautus

and its adaption the *Comedy of Errors*, with their own confusion of twin masters and twin servants. By such lively repetition the theatre contrives to subsist on its limited available number of dramatic plots, which have been narrated by some ingenious Frenchman and estimated at under forty. All of us are engaged more or less in "adapting" them, as for instance the theme of the woman with a past, not the most elevated of themes, is adapted successively in Dumas' *Dame aux Camélias*, Sudermann's *Magda* and Pinero's *Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. When the Attic dramatists thought of her as the woman borne down by guilt, they made better use of the material.

I was thinking of such matters early in 1927, by which time I had cheerfully relinquished any belief that a dramatist's other plays will reach the stage because one of them has had a long run. It depends on the kind of plays they are and how far they repeat a successful formula. Neither my Flemish legend of *Ulenspiegel* nor my verse parody of drawing-room drama were likely to make a hit, though the latter play, called *One More River*, was given by the Stage Society with a star cast of comedians and was afterwards played by the Cambridge Festival and the Gate. There was no sign of the foundation of a London management such as I would have liked to write for, in the capacity of what the Germans would call a *Hausdichter*, over a term of years. But Matheson Lang, our most successful road actor at that time, a very creditable Othello, a pioneer of the Old Vic, and an outstanding talent in character parts, asked me to adapt for him *Der Patriot* by Alfred Neumann, a Berlin hit of the year before. The play was about the conspiracy of

Count Pahlen against the crazy Paul I of Russia, and it had much in common with a play by Merejkovsky in which Charles Laughton had made one of his early London appearances. Neumann's drama was both stronger and less subtle than the Russian work, though it was equally a free adaptation of history.

*Der Patriot* did not enrapture me, for it had the wordiness of a novelist's play and was designed for the heaviest type of German acting. Lang, however, possessed a sense of comedy among his gifts, and it was certain that Pahlen would suit him better than anything he had played for years, if only vigorous cuts could be made in the script and a less banal title could be found for the English version. He agreed about all this, and said he had an idea that a title must be found somewhere in Shakespeare, maybe in *Julius Caesar*; so that the responsibility was equally divided between us when I sent him a postcard next day with the words *Such Men Are Dangerous*. This seemed to put a different complexion on the play, and in a month the version was finished. Robert Farquharson was to play the explosive and gibbering Czar, and Aubrey Hammond designed the costumes together with settings which gave an effect of pageantry by the simplest means. Gilbert Miller bought the play for America, where he planned to do it in my version but under the name of *The Patriot*, which was to be the screen title also. Leslie Faber, Madge Titherage, Lyn Harding and John Gielgud (then a very young actor) were to go over and play in the New York production, which was to be designed by Norman Bel Geddes. This was a spectacular failure only a few weeks before our own success in Edinburgh, which

was to be repeated in London. I am, however, looking forward a little, for the year of this play was 1928 when it had some 300 English performances.

1927 was a poor year in our London theatre, for the reason that neither dramatists nor directors were doing anything distinctive ; and the American drama had scarcely begun to arrive. But it was about this time that the Cambridge Festival Theatre came into being, thanks to Terence Gray and his lighting expert and co-director C. Harold Ridge. For years this was to be a very provocative stage, handling both classics and modern plays in a fresh way. The acting and directive talents that sprang from it were as notable as those from the more conventional provincial theatres, the Liverpool Playhouse under William Armstrong and the Birmingham Repertory under Sir Barry Jackson. The idea of linking up the theatre with wine and food at an adjoining restaurant made an appeal to the University, and even more to the visitor from London. Terence Gray meant his own process of adaptation applied to drama to be as positive as the Elizabethan process of the dramatist. He was himself a disinterested patron and friend of theatre art ; and I would rather not dwell on the more perverse of his productions, made on an uncurtained stage with an architectural setting. These latter conditions were in themselves good, and if the playing and the sense of the dramatic word had been as well conceived and controlled, the Cambridge Festival might have become a new Globe Theatre on Camside. When its director retired from the enterprise and became a wine-grower at Tain l'Hermitage, where he revived some of the growths that had appealed to former



generations of English burgundy-drinkers, he left a gap which was not entirely filled by the artists, like Norman Marshall and Margaret Rawlings, who had worked with him.

There was also the Gate Theatre, which had been started by Peter Godfrey in an upstairs hall near Covent Garden market and was later transferred to better premises under the arches of Charing Cross Station, where, however, the opening hour of performances depended on the closing of a skittle alley next door. This new little theatre, for subscribers only, was opened with *Maya* by Simon Gantillon, which had run a long time in the Studio des Champs-Élysées in Gaston Baty's production, and caused some commotion when it was done in New York. In a country with a censorship like ours, the temptation of a private theatre is to produce plays because they would certainly be censored if submitted, and not because of their own positive merits. Also the Gate had begun with a left-wing tendency, and between the communists and the searchers after forbidden sex plays, it collected a highly specialized audience. Nevertheless *Victoria Regina*, *Parnell* and *Oscar Wilde* came from this theatre to the regular stage, either in London or New York or both; and many good foreign plays were performed as well. The Gate began even to supplant the Stage Society, which had introduced the best foreign plays since the century began, and continued to do so with a diminished membership. After some years the direction of Peter Godfrey had given place to that of Norman Marshall. The rule was to play every evening, including Sundays but without matinees, for three or four weeks at a time; and this allowed for better rehearsal than could be given at

Cambridge or at most of the repertory theatres. Birmingham Repertory, however, made its productions once a fortnight and Liverpool Playhouse once a month.

Salzburg that year was at the height of its social glamour, of which the visitor was perhaps too constantly reminded. Beside the music-lovers and the fashionable international crowd, there was a gathering of critics from many countries to discuss, without undue exertion, the furtherance of their professional interests. I had been asked to represent the London Critics' Circle, and accepted, although criticism was no longer my work in the theatre, because it was a pleasant way of meeting old colleagues and new writers from many capitals. Being mostly accompanied by our wives or other ladies, we went to the opera or the play in congenial groups, attended a glittering midnight reception at Reinhardt's castle, admired the groups of artificial fountains at Hellbrunn which are called in German *Wasserkünste* and in French *théâtres d'eau*, and even made a collective mountain ascent by a steep cable railway which was more agreeable to go up than to come down. I made myself unpopular at the steepest point, when many critical hands were clutching nervously at seats, by mentioning the sorrow which would be felt by the dramatists of Europe if by mischance we should come down too quickly. But each evening in the theatre it was good to see men who had made it a professional rule never to applaud throw etiquette to the winds and remain in the stalls insisting on one more curtain-call for the artists. The operas were *Don Juan* and *Fidelio* ; the plays *Sommernachtstraum* in the Festspielhaus and *Kabale und Liebe* in the town theatre. The Mozart was not very

satisfying, but one was glad of the rare opportunity of hearing and seeing Beethoven's work in all its gloomy grandeur. Again, Reinhardt's conception of poetic happenings in "a wood near Athens" showed little feeling for the real wood which is near Stratford-on-Avon; and even the Berliner critics concurred with the French and ourselves that his *Midsummer Night's Dream* should not be confused with Shakespeare's comedy of the same name. Schiller's play, on the other hand, retained all the delightful quality of its production in Vienna the year before. No one seeing this presentation could contend that Reinhardt is insensitive to his author's text. He transfigured the old work and almost persuaded us it was a masterpiece. Still, however, the original dramatic productions that Salzburg should have made were missing.

The critic-delegates had been presented by a hospitable Government with passes for several weeks over the Austrian railways, and this led to our dispersal before the Festival itself was over. For my own part I had to attend the final rehearsals and first night of my comedy at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Many things had happened there since my last visit. The Courts of Justice had been burned out in the riots of July, which came perilously near breaking an established convention (in the minds of Austrian hotel-keepers at any rate) that there should be no political or other disturbances during the months of the tourist season. Life was unchanged at the Burg, where the company, fresh from summer festivals or lakeside holidays, were making the usual September complaint of having to rehearse five plays at once. This is one of the few drawbacks of the repertory system: the

opening of each new season puts a heavy strain on the players. I noted that rehearsals began at 8 A.M. and went on until noon, when the single meal of the day was taken. The afternoon was for rest and word-study ; then by 6 all were back in the theatre in readiness to play from 7 to 10. By 10.30 they could possibly get away to a restaurant for half an hour, but here social life began and ended. The only matinee was of course on Sunday.

*Das Wirtshaus zum Pechvogel* (or *Mischief Inn*) had become the name of my comedy, and it was a lively experience to be adapted myself in this time of adaptations. If Salten's English was limited, he could write German and that was the main thing ; his cuts and additions to the text pleased me equally. Leon Quartermaine's part was played by Paul Hartmann, who was already one of the leading actors of the German-speaking stage and had been prominent each year at Salzburg. Fay Compton's was taken by Ilse von Wohlgemuth, tall and stately and as delightful as her name. The period suited the Viennese temperament, and since the personages were nameless the English character of the comedy was nameless too : the whole affair readily became European. I saw the costumes made or adapted from the vast wardrobe of the Burg, and the scene made and painted ; and watched the smooth mechanism of the final rehearsals, with telephone installations placed all over the house under shaded lights for the convenience of the *Regisseur* and his assistant the *Abendregisseur* who was already taking over full responsibility from him. I had never seen theatre efficiency like this, and the four morning hours of a Burg rehearsal would cover as much work as a long day

on any stage of London or New York, not to say Paris.

At the dress rehearsal, which began at 10 A.M. to the minute on the day before the production, the house was practically filled ; there must have been 1500 people present. The comedy was received almost in silence, and I thought it had fallen down completely ; but it seemed this army of regular attendants at a Burg rehearsal was hereditary, and had been well trained in generations not to interfere either by laughter or applause with the final touches of the director or the judgment of the critics. The first night went well enough, the public was animated, and an imposing official in court dress with knee-breeches summoned me from my box to make a bow. The old tradition of formally announcing the author's name at the end of a performance, although it stood everywhere in print, was still observed in this theatre. Next morning I hastened to buy all the papers just as one does after a first night in London or New York. There was the story of the play, sure enough — the part of the notice that always interests the dramatist least because he knows it already — and here was a writer saying that the work was *kurz und tief*, which indeed I would have hoped to be true. A day or two later, having said my farewells, I left for London by the roundabout way of Prague, Carlsbad, Dresden and Berlin. Alas, I have never since been in Vienna, where the salutation *Küss' die Hand, Gnädigste* is no empty form of words. Outside the theatre itself, one of my contacts was with Dr. Josef Gregor, the learned director of the State Library and editor of *Monumenta Scenica*, which he was then preparing to bring out. We were to meet again some years later in Rome.

Prague, like Vienna, was just opening its season, and I was able to see productions both in the German and Czech theatres. Since the world success of the plays by the Capeks from this city, there had been a constant interchange of work between the Bohemian, German and Austrian stages: the hit of the moment was Frantisek Langer's *Periferie*, which I had seen at Reinhardt's theatre in Vienna. Josef Capek made very striking designs for this play, which was afterwards seen in many countries. Under the Republic, Prague was always famed for its theatre settings. I stayed in the city long enough to know it for the most Eastern of middle-European capitals and to be sorry to pass on. But I had writing to do this early autumn, and a mind to fast as well, both of which can be pleasantly united with the drinking of waters from hot springs. This led me to Carlsbad, the only town in Europe where one's hotel is just a lodging and not even breakfast need be taken there. Those who breakfast at all in Carlsbad do so at sunny little cafés on the promenades, after rising at dawn to hasten, glass in hand, to their prescribed spring to sip their water slowly while they listen to the band. By 8 A.M. this serious part of the day's work is over; but for an hour or two earlier the main colonnade, with its water-drinkers grouped by nationality, race, profession or social standing, makes a very curious spectacle which the looker-on, glass in hand himself, may well take to be theatrical.

The Sprudel, which leaps from six to twelve feet high in jets renewed each second, within another colonnade adorned by a statue of Hygeia, is certainly theatrical, and some visitors utter cries of admiration when they first behold it, while

others sit entranced and regard it by the hour. It is said to have ceased to flow for three days at the time of the earthquake of Lisbon, and otherwise through the centuries has never failed. The more legitimate theatre in Carlsbad flourishes too, and I saw good guest performances by Moissi and Pallenberg. Many houses in the streets along the river side are inscribed with the names of poets and painters whose lodgings they have been.

The most visited physician of this place made his name by prescribing no diet at all, but a variety and sequence of water-drinking to meet each case. I followed his direction for close upon a fortnight, when having lost about a pound daily and written the greater part of a play, I was shocked to find myself stopping at delicatessen shops in the street and gazing earnestly upon the hams and sausages. The physician, again consulted, declared my cure to be complete and sent me away, a well-irrigated and possibly a better man, to break the fast with milk and autumn fruits. So by way of Dresden, where I paused a few hours to see the Sistine Madonna and the modern gallery, I reached Berlin in late October, where the autumn plays were well under way.

Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater was giving a new version of *Troilus and Cressida* by Hans Rothe, written in a style much more direct and colloquial than the classical (or Gothic) Shakespearean translations of Schlegel and Tieck. Text, acting and scene were all modernized in the liveliest production of this play that I have seen. Of course there is nothing sacrosanct about Schlegel except to the Nazi mind, which became increasingly disquieted about Rothe's activities as translator and eventually threw him out of Germany

for his pains. There is no reason why new translations of Shakespeare should not be made in Germany every fifty or a hundred years. The awkward corollary is that the actual language of Shakespeare, receding more and more from the current idiom of the English-speaking peoples, may in time become as archaic as the language of Chaucer, and so leave his own countrymen lacking essential contact with him. But dramatic posterity will have to solve that problem for itself, and discover how to give stage life to the classical text.

In the adjoining Kammerspiele I saw Wedekind's *Die Büchse der Pandora*, perhaps one of the last satisfying productions of this dramatist before his work was prohibited altogether. It was also an object-lesson in the uses of chamber-theatre seating two or three hundred people, the selective audience for the play of intimate, psychological interest. For such varied productions as these two, Reinhardt could find always the right directors among his lieutenants.

The advance guard of the Berlin audience, however, had by this time been drawn away from Reinhardt by Erwin Piscator, the director of the Theater am Nollendorferplatz, who had the reputation of being communist and super-Soviet in his theatrical style. He was doing *Hoppla, wir leben!* by Toller, an affair of divided stages, platforms and ladders, film effects and all the battery of constructivist drama. This had a vogue of sorts and the direction was certainly creative, but the gap between drama and treatment was altogether too wide. In a suburb I visited Toller, who was none too happy about his play and indeed had never quite taken his dramatic bearings since his release from imprisonment. Piscator of course had real gifts, which



developed as he shed his pseudo-Russian mannerisms and party attachments ; but he was another artist who had not long to live and work in Germany, and the price on his head was eventually considerable. But for the catastrophe of 1939, he would have made for Gilbert Miller, with a text by Alfred Neumann, a dramatic version of *War and Peace* for which I was to work as adapter.

Coming home by the Hook as autumn turned to early winter, I met a German woman explorer of African forests and student of primitive mankind, who was on her way to England to fit out her coming expedition. We talked with the zest which two people can only feel if they have just met for the first time and have a subject of absorbing interest between them. This was solitude and the forest, for I doubt if she had ever given two thoughts to a play. In London she came to visit in our home. Her name is forgotten and I have never heard of her again, but hope she lives.

## I 2

### ATHENIAN SPRING

Early in 1928, while Princes Street and the Castle still lay snowbound under winter sunshine, *Such Men Are Dangerous* opened in Edinburgh ; and this was the beginning of a capacity tour of the play. The London première was not to be until the autumn, but a provincial success was assured from the first rehearsal. This was one of the advantages of working with Matheson Lang ; but others lay in the thoroughness of his producing method and the sensibility with which a text was handled. Cuts and additions were discussed each evening, tried and agreed ; then from their word-perfect stage onward the company held to every line. All details of the mounting were handled with equal pains, so that there was no question of "try-out" but only of finished presentation. In all these respects the tour of an English actor-producer compared very well with the hectic "out-of-town" fortnight or month which I had known in America before a Broadway opening.

Meanwhile I had been asked to do another play for Lang, this time an adaptation of Lion Feuchtwanger's *Jew Süss*. At first I urged that a Jew ought to undertake this work, for

to my mind the climax of the tale lay in the conversion of Josef Süß Oppenheimer, after his life of showy splendour at the Court of Württemberg and the tragedy of his daughter's death in seeking to escape a royal seducer, to the Israelite mystical faith whose unceasing advocate and apostle had been the Rabbi Gabriel. It was this withdrawal of the chief character from the Gentile world to the citadel of Judaism that seemed to lift the novel above the commonplace of highly-coloured historical narrative ; for the hanging of Süß sky-high in a cage was one of the minor sensations of the eighteenth century, and there is no record of his apotheosis through repentance or any other religious gesture. I felt that in making a play of the subject, no one but a Jew might be able to convey the mingled humility and pride, abnegation and ecstasy, cringing and magnificence, in which the hero of Feuchtwanger's romance approaches this elevated end. Lang, however, was determined that I should do the work for him ; and I reflected that he was not even a Jew himself but a cousin of the Archbishop of Canterbury with a Scots accent which became more noticeable when he made his nightly curtain speeches in the cities north of the Border. (He was also much liked by his company and it was good to work with him again.) As for myself, Sir William Rothenstein had once mentioned finding my name in an old German-Jewish encyclopaedia he possessed, but all my other hopes of establishing a non-Aryan ancestry had been disappointed. The subject-matter of *Jew Süß* itself was rich enough to tempt any playwright.

Feuchtwanger had originally written his own version of the tale as a drama, which was published in the years of the

first War but was either unperformed or unsuccessful. He then decided to make a novel of it, and rather strangely this took the shape of a book almost devoid of dialogue, for which was substituted a subtle analysis of situation. The novel met with no more popularity in Germany than the play, but it became a best-seller both in America (where I think it was called *Power*) and in England where it owed much to the critical praise of Arnold Bennett. The lack of dialogue suited me well enough, for my task as adapter was to read the book two or three times, put it aside for good, make a list of the characters who seemed to me dramatically indispensable, forget about the rest and set about writing a play on the same theme with the same general sequence of action. The movement, scene by scene, up to the death of the Duke was inevitable ; but I would myself have wished to prolong the drama beyond this actual accomplishment of the Jew's revenge, and to follow the tale as far as the condemned cell, the executioner and the cage, and the Rabbi who brings his own dark absolution to Süß. This was not to be, and more than one of my suggested closing scenes disappeared in the final version. The adapter's way is sometimes hard ; but so is the playwright's way altogether. We should not forget that Ibsen wrote a "happy" ending to *A Doll's House*, in which Nora's affection for Helmer triumphs over her resolve to leave him and brings her back after the banging of the door ; and this was printed for years in translations of the play and left to the choice of the playhouses of Europe.

*Jew Süß* in English eventually turned out well enough to please not only Lang and the public but also Feuchtwanger,

who had my version translated into German under his own supervision and performed in a number of German theatres about 1930-31. Meanwhile his own original play was done into Yiddish and produced in New York in the autumn of 1929 after our London success had drawn attention to the theme. This, however, is again looking forward a year or two. I mention here the various ramifications of the Süß story because they illustrate possibilities in collaborative dramatic creation. Our way of going successively to work upon the legendary tale was quite Elizabethan ; and if we did not achieve a great drama, that was perhaps the fault of the current stage as well as our own.

This theme required leisure and reflection for the writing. I could have found both in London, since I was no longer obliged to follow the round of plays unless they were, like *Back to Methuselah* at the Court, of some outstanding significance. Here, set in Shaw's intellectual platinum, both harder than gold and chillier in effect, were some of the glittering talents of the years to come — Cedric Hardwicke, Edith Evans, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Laurence Olivier for example. I cannot remember much else of dramatic importance at this time ; for with the first sign of spring I took a sixpence and tossed it to decide whether I should go to write in Spain or in Greece, the two countries I most desired to visit. The coin came down for Greece ; and if I have since regretted never having set foot in Spain (for some inopportune rehearsals prevented me from attending the Lope de Vega celebrations in Seville a few years later), one should never question a step so decided. Otherwise, why toss a sixpence ?

The journey to Greece, lasting many weeks, was the only one of its kind that I have made alone ; and however lovely a companionship in travel can be, there are times when one needs no man or woman, day or night. In a writer's life strangers can suffice, if he has time for them and patience with them and enough thoughts to occupy his own mind. He need never talk to them, but only sit as in a Marseilles café to watch the Arabs, sailors, merchants and the rest go by. Personal silence and solitude are good in themselves ; and where can they not be enjoyed ? I would never wish to travel with a man or woman capable of being bored when alone or restless in silent company. After all, the ever-visible spectacle is a drama and not a senseless confusion of movement, fact and object. To lean on a bridge and watch the loading of a barge, as much as to sit awaiting the rise of a curtain, can form the mirror and pattern of the mind.

On the way south I stayed a while in Paris to see what the *Cartel* of little theatres was doing ; and found it, as always in the inter-War years, the main thing of dramatic consequence. The French were far ahead of us in two respects : they had talented directors in control of a group of small stages, and they had playwrights who understood where the director could help them and in what degree their own independent inspiration could serve the theatre. A great part of this co-operation and understanding was a legacy from the time of Copeau and the Vieux-Colombier. It was true that Copeau himself had retired into the provinces to form artists and devise plays in his own way ; and he would not entirely have approved the eventual careers of Gaston

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

Baty and Louis Jouvet, for whom the little theatre was in some sense an apprenticeship, and who eventually were caught up in the activities of the major stages and the screen studios. But there was this to be said, that when artists of the Jouvet quality came on to the boulevards and brought dramatists of the Giraudoux quality with them, they preserved all the integrity of their own work and communicated it to their authors as well. The little professional theatre has been the cradle of all distinguished writing, direction, acting and stagecraft in the France we have known ; and beside it the pontifical triviality of a Sacha Guitry seems very dull and unimportant. At that time in the little theatres I remember best *Volpone*, a typical example of group dramatic authorship, freely adapted by Stefan Zweig into German from Ben Jonson's original, and then freely adapted back again into French. There was also the perennial *Dr. Knock* of Jules Romains, which Granville-Barker had translated into English. Expressionism had gained a footing at the Studio des Champs-Élysées ; and one of Lenormand's series of psychological dramas, bearing so profoundly the character of our time, was to be seen.

The next step of the journey took me into Provence at the peak of the bull-fighting season ; but I have a clearer memory of the river Sorgues at Vaucluse, which issues full-grown from a hillside to flow past the villa where Petrarch wrote his poems to Laura. Should one come to this unique and limpid source at a later season, as I came with a fellow-pilgrim in September of another year, the rocky basin under the cliff is half emptied and the stream itself idles through banners of heavy weeds ; but in March the aged Provençal

earth brims over freely. So, too, the fantastic structure of the Pont du Gard, built to carry water across water by its Roman arches, is at its loftiest when the full torrent runs through the cleft below. And in spring also the uncrowded coaches of the P.L.M. convey lovers from one of these sights to the other and to the Roman arenas of Nîmes and Arles, or to those ghostly hilltop relics of Les Baux, cat-haunted, which give them pause to count their nights and know they are not eternal.

From here to Nice (its Carnival just ended) was another step, and thence to Genoa a third ; for this port was to be the starting-point of my Grecian journey proper. Having a mind to see as much as possible by the way, I secured passage on a big Italian liner, the *Conte Grande* I believe, which was making her maiden crossing to New York but touching at Naples where I could disembark. The city was hung with flags to celebrate her sailing next day at noon. I spent the evening in a visit to Edward Gordon Craig, who was then living on one of the hills of the Genoese suburbs, in a villa with a garden approached by a narrow stone-paved footway. The handbell at the gate made distant music in the porch of the house, and gave warning to a couple of formidable dogs which may have been kept to deal with creditors. When these defenders had been called off by one of the youngsters of the family, there sure enough was Craig himself coming benignly down the path to welcome a visitor. We entered a room so full of books that they covered the walls and overflowed on to middle shelves. Parchment, calf and morocco had, however, no effect of mustiness as in our northern climate ; or maybe they had



borrowed something of their owner's freshness of spirit, far removed from the scholarly. This is no place to record more than a glimpse of Craig, who has been mistrusted by his countrymen as only a man can be who writes as well as he draws, and talks as well as either, and prefers living in France or Italy ; who has never concealed his revolutionary aims in theatre design and practice, and has acquired a European name like those of Appia or Stanislavsky ; and in fact who proposes to be well remembered when many of his English theatre contemporaries are forgotten.

Over dinner we talked of *The Mask*, which he had managed to bring out for years ; and of other theatre projects of the past and future. He had lately produced Ibsen's *The Pretenders* at the State Theatre in Copenhagen ; but his last London production had been *The Vikings* as far back as 1903. Coming down with me to the gate at midnight, he had many recommendations of theatre interest for Naples, Sicily and Greece ; but he had difficulty in recalling names. Apart from written or printed drama, I think Craig must have forgotten more about theatre than the rest of us ever knew.

Next day our brand-new liner, her paint scarcely dry, cast off from the pier to an accompaniment of salvos from shore batteries and warships, sirens from every vessel in port, speeches from notabilities, national anthems from a band and huzzas from the Genoese multitude. Soon we were out in the bay, receding from a city which loomed like a vast theatre intent (as in fact it was) upon our performance. This was decidedly a spectacle for the solitary and undistracted looker-on ; as was also the flow of Chianti,

Barbera and Asti Spumante which celebrated the sailing. The boat had anchored in the bay of Naples by the time we got up in the morning ; and the excitement was renewed as one went on deck to take in the panorama at a glance, assuring oneself by a second look at Vesuvius that it was really true. I was one of a handful of passengers getting off, accompanied by a stowaway who had been found overnight; and when our tender left for the shore it was given a lively ovation. There was no customs officer on the quay to declare that my baggage had come from Genoa and pass it through the dock gates ; and every messenger who went to look for him came back to ask for five lire. The liner weighed anchor and made off to New York before he came.

The San Carlo in Naples is a paragon among theatres, as I was able to see for myself that evening. The Museo Nazionale is a paragon among museums, and its *piccoli bronzi* and wall-paintings from Pompeii are very circumspcctly shown. An English guidebook to the city observes of this special collection that " ladies should seek advice before entering the rooms ". My advice to them is to brazen it out. The Blue Grotto may be a paragon among blue grottos, but we could not enter it because the sea was rough and the boat-owner was not insured against broken heads. No scene-painter has conceived any paragon of scene-painting so discreetly gaudy as Capri. To wait ten days in Naples for a boat to Athens was a week too long, so that I faced the worst in Italian travel by making a night journey to Brindisi overland. The early morning hours were spent in looking out upon a Calabrian landscape that seemed to be fissured, sulphurous and in every way repellent.

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

In Brindisi I made haste to get aboard a Greek steamer, regardless of the agent's hint that sheep might be among her passengers. So constantly were sheep among them that there was no hour of the day, certainly not the luncheon or dinner hour at the captain's table, when a lamb or ewe might not come to rub against one's chair. Variety was added to numbers, for when we put sheep ashore at Valona or Santi Quaranta we took others aboard for Corfu or Patras. But this voyage was enlivened by the happy chance that we anchored in Corfu harbour an hour before the beginning of the yearly procession of Saint Spiridion, an Orthodox monk and patron of the island, whose embalmed remains are carried under a canopy by bearded priests, while music is made by civic and religious performers alike. To these were added, as at Genoa, the ships' sirens; and such a cacophony alone would make the feast memorable. But Corfu was dressed that day for the parade of rich vestments and the drift of incense through narrow streets. The saint has always been not only invoked but beloved by his people, whom he has preserved from many threatened calamities and avenged for others. As they withdrew into the church bearing his name, the clergy surrounded their patron's relic as our peers and officers of state surround a King after his coronation.

As spectators of this scene, we were unwillingly recalled to a boat that meanwhile had gathered more sheep than ever to her hospitable decks. The captain said that most of them would be turned loose on uninhabited islands with fresh springs, and there left to graze unattended until autumn. This use of pasturage explained the carrying of sheep to

Greece, where nothing but mutton has been bred and grown for centuries. Amid the flocks a German professor lay in a deck-chair reading his Peloponnesian War; and as we passed an island he pointed out to me the scanty covering of grass broken by cliff or crag. In these lands of the ancients, he said, our earth stands naked or next to naked in the wash of the sea, as she has stood in all recorded time; so much the pitiless sun and wind have worn her covering away. Then he went back to Greek strategy, in which the physical nature of the country was all-important; but I began to see the other Greece, builder of monuments and cities, in perspective as possessor of a natural background. Nothing has arisen by way of art that is not related directly to the arid scene. Temple and theatre, arch and column and pediment belong to the hills of bare earth, where grass and olive-grove and cypress are no more than lichen on a roof or a wall. We came soon to the Corinth Canal, cut in a deep straight groove through this earth to make the shortest way from Athens to the West. I think we passed Mount Parnassus before the Acropolis came into view in the middle distance, some miles inland and above the harbour of the Piraeus.

Those entitled to be called travellers jog willingly on horseback along the valleys and over the passes of Greece, visiting antiquities or simply seeking adventure in unfamiliar places. I have done enough of this travelling to declare myself a tourist instead. There are places like the Hieron of Epidaurus with its great theatre, a matter of twenty miles from the sea, to which a man can ride horseback (as I did) with pleasure. Marathon may be another, and there are some who think that Delphi, Thebes and Olympia require a

nag and a courier ; but I would sooner take rail or steamer from Athens, and even then not overdo such excursions. The Hellenic Club enjoys its jaunt by motor-coach down the Sacred Way to Eleusis, and its tactful lecture on the Eleusinian rites by a classically-minded clergyman perched on a broken column. But Athens remains actually most satisfying because the antiquarian interest never succeeds in overlaying the aesthetic. Monuments are seen continually with fresh pleasure, even though the housewives of the city hang their linen from pillar to pillar of a temple. The monuments of the Acropolis, preserved from such treatment by a small admission charge, have no character whatever of museum pieces. They have an equal grandeur at whatever hour they are visited, whether noon or dusk or midnight. The same is true of the Dionysian theatre at the foot of the Acropolis and the Odeion or Greco-Roman theatre higher up the road ; and these ruins have far more importance in the history of the stage than is implied by their architectural classification, often so meaningless, as "early" or "late". Everything about them has an interest for our theatre of to-day, from their remarkable acoustics to their foreshadowing of scenic equipment and the focus of the spectator's vision upon a plastic picture at a given distance. These two theatres viewed together, and especially considered in relation to the truly perfect arena at Epidauros, show how the great orchestral space in its original entirety was invaded by the seats of privileged members of the audience, and how this began the backward thrust of the platform of dramatic action which has gradually given us the proscenium theatre of to-day. There is no other art

whose monuments trace and forecast its growth so clearly. We have only to think of the changes in the writing of drama, in stagecraft and in acting which must accompany such drastic changes in the theatre's physical shape, to see why Athens remains the first theatre city and the source from which dramatic inspiration flows.

Nor is the background of modern Athens, so uncongenial to the antiquarian mind, at all disturbing to the observer who finds a living interest in the monuments. I enjoyed my Shaw translated into Greek at one playhouse, and my Sophocles modernized at another ; a Chaplin film with Greek captions and a French cabaret with Greek accents ; an Easter procession of Athenian maidens carrying lighted candles through the windy streets and getting well waxed-up on their way ; the roulette men turning their perpetual wheels at street-corners and trying to beguile the passer-by by paying out huge winnings to confederates ; the sudden concourse of talkative coffee-drinkers in the main square and their equally sudden dispersal ; the kilted Greek highlanders making gallant advances to ladies on the boulevard, and bouncing from one rebuff to another until they met with a willing partner ; the Athens races where dubious thoroughbreds from the stables of warned-off English trainers galloped round a circus-like track in a cloud of dust ; a flight over the islands in a Greek naval seaplane with a pilot to whom I had a letter of introduction from London ; and indeed everything about Greece except a sneezing-germ which is said to be carried on the wind from Egypt every spring. I liked the wine and even the mutton when once I had taken the advice of the reverend lecturer

on Eleusinian mysteries, and bought myself in the market a rope of garlic with which to supplement (one cannot say neutralize) the diet. This purchase eventually had the happy result of securing me a cabin to myself on a well-filled boat sailing for Marseilles. I cherished my supply of the savoury root during a voyage which took us to Syracuse and Messina, past the brimstone-laden Stromboli and through the straits between Sardinia and Corsica. In the customs shed of the French port I laid out one or two Tanagra figures as my only objects to declare ; but the *douaniers* ignored them and brought to light my garlic, which they confiscated under the heading of imported vegetable produce and doubtless ate themselves. Athenian spring had turned to English summer before I was back in London, all scripts for the present completed, and plans laid for a season or two of theatre ahead. When, again, shall we ever see so far ?

## I3

### LAST LULL IN ENGLAND

Midway between the wars Europe had her forebodings born of inward unrest, but England was to snatch a year or two more of quietude and even optimism. Only after the Wall Street crash of 1929, whose dust swept around the world like the volcanic cloud projected by the Pacific waves from the crater of Krakatoa, did we peer obscurely into the future and see the political storm gathering behind an economic depression — how inevitably gathering, historians will say. The months or years before a catastrophe are in themselves dramatic as one looks back upon them. In my own mind I call this time of 1928-29 the last lull in England, for in many ways it was like the time of 1913-14.

Of the summer after my Grecian journey I chiefly recall Alpine days, varied by a visit to Salzburg where Reinhardt, who was contemplating work in the movies for the first time in his career, had made a screen-like theatre production of Schiller's *Die Räuber*. This was partly a counterblast to the Berlin productions of Piscator, which had established the new director and made the Herr Professor look old-



fashioned in the eyes of seekers after sheer dramatic novelty ; but it betrayed also a certain weariness of the simpler things in theatre, such as the direct appeal of poetry. Reinhardt was unlucky in the moment of his approach to the screen, for the great change-over to the talkie was just being made and he would have directed silent pictures (just as he directed wordless plays) best of all. 1928 was also the year of his New York season, in which he presented several of his Salzburg plays and brought Moissi, Hartmann and the Thimig family before the American public. Outwardly Schloss Leopoldskron and the Festival were just as before, and the trolley-cars brought their loads of young Bavarian tourists from a peaceful Berchtesgaden a few miles away.

One of the September plays in London was *Such Men Are Dangerous*, which began a run lasting some months. Matheson Lang had chosen well in casting Robert Farquharson for the Czar in opposition to his own Pahlen ; this actor brought an Italianate delicacy to the playing of what might have been the most bogus of character parts, too often definable as parts without character. Another leading player arose from this production in Donald Wolfitt, who played the sentry Stepan. The play itself was no masterpiece, but it had a strength that was brought out to the full by the simplicity of Aubrey Hammond's background, and Lang made the crafty conspirator a man of wit and even a lover as well. Reginald Denham, who directed, has since become a screen director and playwright. *The Fountain-Head*, which I had finished rather suitably at Carlsbad, came on a little later for a limited season ; its only subsequent

appearance outside repertory was at the Maddermarket in Norwich.

I had myself taken advantage of the carefree years and a flow of royalties to buy the freehold of a stone-built hall near my home in Kensington and still nearer to Notting Hill Gate, which had been formerly the toll-bar entry to London by the road from Oxford. The building to which this hall belonged was a nonconformist church of the 1850's facing a short drive with double gateways, through which the carriage-folk of the period had proceeded in state to their austere devotions. Both structures were of Cornish granite in the plainest modern-Gothic style. The hall was long since disused for religious purposes, and had been in fact everything from a military billet to a polling-station. It could have seated perhaps 400 people in its main space, floored in oak and heavily rafted ; but my first proceeding was to wall it off into two sections. I had an immediate use for one of these as the school of the Marie Rambert dancers, afterwards to become the Ballet Rambert. The other remained for a while the studio of a sculptor in wood who used entire tree-trunks as the medium of his carvings. This latter section, opening upon the quiet and almost rural Ladbroke-road, was to become the theatre of the Ballet Club and afterwards the Mercury. The acquisition gave me the first idea of making theatre productions myself, and this is perhaps a reason for mentioning it here. To tie oneself to a property on such a scale was an action that needed to be boldly followed up and justified in the event. It may have been so justified, but at the cost of years of thought and labour and many kinds of embarrassment — in fact of most

troubles except the surrender of personal independence and control. But had I the choice to make, I would do it all again.

The outstanding play of 1928-29 in our regular theatre was *Journey's End*, one of a growing list of commercial successes presented in the first place by the Stage Society as works of art. R. C. Sherriff's play imposed its own positive style on the director and all the cast, so that its transfer to the West End followed with ease. As a soldier's document of war, convincing in every line, it went very shortly all over Europe and the world. I saw it in French and German, as well done as in English, and at one time there were nearly twenty companies playing it somewhere every night. Maurice Browne, the director who controlled the big organization needed to deal with the rights, was himself a little theatre man of long American experience who now became a commercial producer more from necessity than choice. Others also among the producing managers of this period were enterprising enough, and had more ideas in their heads than the playwrights they were trying to discover. We had to wait a year for another outstanding work by a newer dramatist in Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*.

Rehearsals of *Jew Süss* began in London in July 1929 and were continued in Blackpool where the play was to be first produced. This town is a resort made theatrical by its choice as a brief summer paradise of the Lancashire workers, who have required from it the Tower and the ballroom, the dancing crowds swaying in hypnosis and the diapasons of the giant organ, the oyster parlours and the exhibitions of freaks, the suicidal switchbacks and all the joys of a water-

front in perpetual carnival. Riding horseback on the sands with Peggy Ashcroft, who was taking her first important part in Naemi, I was entitled to wonder if so much theatre in life made the town best for our purpose of drama ; but we were crowded as soon as we opened. Without following the play's tour of the Northern cities, I went off to Malvern where Sir Barry Jackson promised Shaw's *The Apple Cart* for the opening of a dramatic festival. This was to be an English summer in earnest.

Like Reinhardt at Leopoldskron, Barry Jackson had his own country home near by ; and he brought to Malvern the nucleus of a company and an administrative staff from his repertory theatre in Birmingham. As the original producer of *Back to Methuselah* he had a special association with the work of Shaw, who repaid him with amiable perfidy by giving the actual first production of *The Apple Cart* to a theatre in Warsaw. But the first English performance was important enough to bring to Malvern a trainload of dramatic critics and to cram its decorous hotels with visitors, among whom elderly spinsters propping their Shaw against the coffee-pot at the breakfast-table were conspicuous. The youth of Salzburg was decidedly lacking ; but then Malvern, comfortably spread on the slopes of rounded hills above the garden of Worcestershire, has none but an educational connection with the young. Nor was it ever visited, until Festival days, for any object of interest but the admirable stained glass of the Priory. Below this church the pump room and assembly hall, with the bandstand and gardens laid out for miniature golf and croquet, completed, with a typical provincial theatre and a movie house, the

entertainment value of the resort. Above, the twin beacon hills clad in bracken and scarred by quarries were accessible to an agile walker (say Shaw nearing eighty) in less than an hour.

The dramatist, in this and succeeding years, became something like the patron saint of Malvern ; and striding around in his Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers of the Ibsen period, he might have been an emblem of the ascendancy of drama over direction on the Festival stage. *The Apple Cart* itself was characteristic, intellectually, of the time midway between the wars. Avoiding obvious complacency, it was yet not in the least disturbing, but consisted only of a stream of lively talk about a world as it never had been and never would be. The last lull in England might have lasted for ever under the persuasive intonation of Cedric Hardwicke's King Magnus. Later Reinhardt gave the play in Berlin under the title *Der Kaiser von Amerika*, cutting it by a third of its length to great advantage and to its author's indignation. The London production was an immense autumn success, thanks to all the discussion of the play since summer ; and so it was that Malvern, unlike Salzburg, became a stage for the first performance of drama. Barry Jackson had met a need of the vacation time which was not entirely satisfied by the Stratford Festival, then under the direction of Bridges Adams and later of Iden Payne. Stratford had always been a lovely place to visit in April for the Birthday and the first few nights of the repertory, and it remained an inviting goal by road from London for its afternoon performances ; but Malvern, if you accepted the limitations of an English festival, could be more enter-

aining. Though Shakespeare and the Birthplace live on, I shall remember the landlord of my Malvern inn scratching his head over Shaw, raising a tankard to the old gentleman's health, and declaring he will go to his play another night "to see if it's all leg-pullin' or no".

And so to Birmingham by Henley-in-Arden for the last provincial performances of *Jew Süß*, and to London with the play; where after concluding our dress rehearsal, we came from the stage door past a long all-night queue waiting to get pit seats for the opening twenty-four hours later. This was no absolute guarantee of success; but when people lined up at the breakfast hour after the first night to get seats for the second, we knew that we had scored a hit. A few days later, visiting Lang's dressing-room, I found him perturbed by the reaction of the audience. If he did not know, he said, that no seat was to be had for love or money weeks ahead, he would suppose the play to be the biggest flop in his experience. Curtain-calls — why, there were no curtain-calls worth mentioning for such a success; the people just got up and went home. Lang was in a theatrical difficulty because his very real acting gifts would not serve him in the part of Süß without a searching self-surrender. Character-playing was of no use; this Jew had to be lived and his mind and heart made known. Lang, I think, felt all this; and had he been able, after the scene of his revenge upon the Duke, to stand alone with the spectator and listener and speak to them directly of the drama as it concerned his own nature — had the play in fact followed its original plan — I think he would have made a completer study of his hero.

Such theatrical difficulties arise most commonly in mid-

rehearsal, when an author can often help to resolve them. In so far as they are difficulties of timing and movement, he can quickly place himself in the position of the player, face the imaginary audience, and add the line or make the cut that may be required. Rather more difficult are transpositions of text to follow sequences of thought or feeling that a player, though not always able to express himself in exact terms, knows to be needful to the sincerity of his performance. Emotionally he does not want to "cheat a bit", as the director will often tell him to do in stage movement; his own inner integrity requires him to find every line convincing. The author, here, can nearly always help him by slight reconstructions of text conformable to acting logic, which is not always the logic of writing. The greater theatrical difficulties are those arising deep in a player's mind from an incompatibility between his intention and his dramatist's imagination; and with these one does one's best if the play is to go on at all. I suppose the texts of Elizabethan drama as they come down to us, with all the stage-managers' corrections that scholars call *variorum* readings, reflect these difficulties, their partial solution at the time of rehearsal or performance, and their abandonment in the main to posterity.

An outstanding performance in *Jew Süss* was that of Peggy Ashcroft, who reflected the simple integrity of the part she played; and a wise and subtle portrait was the Weissensee of Felix Aylmer. The play had been running a few weeks at capacity when the Wall Street market broke, and with it the bond of finance and entertainment the world over. This was perhaps regarded as an incident by English

observers ; but actually theatre receipts were never again to reflect the daily trend of stock prices. Plays like ours continued their London run almost undisturbed, but American rights were immediately affected. At the end of this year 1929, aware that something serious had happened to the economy of the world, I reckoned myself lucky to be the richer by the writing of plays, and bought a couple of houses next to my hall with the notion that they might one day prove useful. By the spring of 1930 the idea of contriving a theatre within my existing walls had definitely taken shape ; and from now onward months were spent in planning and measuring, designing a stage and proscenium and fore-stage, lighting and furnishing and decorating and all the rest of the business. There is time enough in a writer's life for such things, if he chooses to busy himself with them ; and in fact the putting of words on paper, which is more a pleasure than a toil, blends well enough with the relaxation of handling practical affairs. Many times I have thought I would rather be a farmer, a carpenter or a fisherman than a theatre-owner ; but I have never wished to lay down a pen for long, or to abandon the writer's way of talking to fellow-creatures willing to listen. Least of all would I have wished to give up writing plays because I had made a stage on which to perform them.

My theatre, however, was first of all intended for performances of that semi-public kind which our law benevolently allowed. One had only to form a members' club like the Gate or the Arts in order to play freely, on weekdays or Sundays, without reference to any public authority. A company was available in the dancers of the Ballet Ram-



bert, whose repertory already included modern classics like *Sylphides* and *Carnaval* and new compositions by Frederick Ashton which everybody wished to see because he was the hope of English choreography. We had our own rooms for the making of costumes from designs, and our own workshop where every stick of scenery could be made and painted. At first there were only 500 subscribers, but this number was soon doubled or trebled, so that the yearly subscriptions alone could be relied on to pay for three new productions. After one or two experimental seasons in the early part of 1931 the Ballet Club settled down to Sunday performances ; and for nearly ten years these were a distinctive part of the theatre life of London. I shall say very little more of Ballet, which (perhaps because it is wordless) is more written about than any other form of theatre art. But this enterprise was of course entirely dependent on the artistic direction and integrity of Marie Rambert, who undertook complete responsibility back-stage as I undertook it in front. There were no guarantors and no committee ; we lived within our own joint incomes and had nothing to limit our personal authority and independence. I was even able to indulge a collector's taste for prints and paintings. But especially I learned from these first steps in management how to run a regular theatre of my own, which should be equally independent in direction.

About this time I went back to theatrical criticism in *Theatre Arts*, as distinct from the dramatic reviewing that could be found in most of our papers. The dramatists of the time were few, the theatrical possibilities were many. It was a time when the stage, with adequate confidence in

itself and support from capital, could have made a bold gesture of independence and rallied its own public without reference to the screen. But none except Diaghilev had made such a gesture; and his direction of the Ballets Russes, more fashionable than ever socially, had become fashionable in the pursuit of painters and musicians in vogue. He died during the summer of 1929 on the Lido, and the Ballets Russes came to an end for the time being.

Early in 1930, being in Liverpool to give the Shute theatre lectures in the University, I crossed over to visit Ireland for the first time. (Many Englishmen who know all Europe have never got so far.) I find a record that our boat "missed the mouth of the Liffey and anchored for some hours in a fog off the Irish shore, exchanging groans with unseen steamers in a like predicament, until towards noon a gleam of late winter sun showed the way between a pair of lighthouses into the river channel". Naturally I thought this must happen every morning to the Liverpool packet, but Dubliners disabused me. There were lots of them along the quay, busied in supporting walls; and there were side-cars (called by the English jaunting-cars) with fast-trotting horses, and an excellent variety of saloons and barber shops. In a street near the main bridge was the Abbey Theatre, facing which I was able to stand alone, like many visitors before me and after, to venerate the shabby little building in which *The Playboy of the Western World* had first been performed. I guessed that in this hospitable city I might scarcely be alone again, but should approach the Abbey with some Irish friend telling me that Synge never made good in Dublin; and then I should be reduced to saying to myself

that I would give all the plays ever produced at the Abbey for a single act of *The Playboy*, the third for choice. So it all proved to be ; and let me never argue with Irishmen about their one dramatist of genius, but only say how good it is to enter a theatre where a painting of a poet, the portrait of Yeats, hangs above the box-office.

By the kindness of Lennox Robinson I lived during this visit at Dalkey, a few miles south of Dublin on a misty bay under misty hills. The journey was made by a primitive railroad ; and actually all the conditions of Dublin life reminded one that this was a city with the airs of a European capital, but the graces of a provincial town of the nineteenth century. I have returned to Dublin since then, and would willingly return oftener ; but although the horse-drawn side-cars have vanished, the provincial grace remains in my mind as the virtue of the city. My theatre experiences were a good production of O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman* at the Abbey, and Goethe's *Faust* at the Gate, which since 1930 or thereabouts has been a serious rival of the other playhouse. The claim of the Abbey to be the only existing National Theatre in the English-speaking world has been substantiated, since about the same time, by the small but useful subsidy paid to it by the Eire Government.

1931 began with the opening of the new Sadler's Wells Theatre in Islington, the associate and counterpart of the Old Vic on the other side of the Thames. The work of John Gielgud, and his Hamlet especially, had raised the prestige of the people's theatre, as the Old Vic could claim to be ; and in the years of optimism Sadler's Wells was planned and the building begun on the site of an older playhouse,

remembered alike for Grimaldi the clown and Samuel Phelps the Shakespearean actor. The name was derived from a spring first owned by the monks of Clerkenwell (the clergy's well) and then paved over and rediscovered as a spa in the seventeenth century, when a Mr. Sadler built around it all manner of booths for fairs and circuses, outlasting his day until they were replaced by a music-garden and opera house and then a theatre proper. Prosperous London suburbs grew up in the fields near by; and my grandfather kept a school for the sons of gentlemen only (no tradesmen's sons admitted) in a large house with a fish-pond just beyond "the Wells", as the place was always called. The idea of the new venture was that opera and Shakespeare should alternate at the two theatres; but very soon the Wells became the home of opera and ballet, while the Old Vic continued with drama, now ranging from the Elizabethans to Chekhov. Lilian Baylis remained in control of both houses; and at the back of the pit in Sadler's Wells she would have a trap in the floor lifted to show a visitor the spring of clear water still flowing.

In the same year the Malvern Festival, which had followed up *The Apple Cart* with a first production of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, gave a sequence of drama from Shakespeare's predecessors to James Bridie, our contemporary Scots dramatist. Notable also was the first London visit of the Compagnie des Quinze under Michel Saint-Denis, who gave us André Obey's *Noé* and *Le Viol de Lucrèce*. This company proved how simple the equipment of the theatrical theatre (as distinct from the lifelike theatre) could be. A tent-like variant of the ordinary backcloth and a few con-

structional pieces and properties could give an illusion of scenic grandeur to the poet's play. In fact the scene and costumes had mostly been made by the company themselves, and everything could be loaded on a single small van. The plays could be given with equal effect either in a barn or a large London theatre. The work of Copeau at the Vieux-Colombier and in his country farmhouse was bearing fruit, and new ways of expression were opening to the dramatist as well as the actor and director. All the plays of the Compagnie were works of collaboration.

During the summer I was asked to make the English version of a German play which itself owed much to Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*. The author was Ferdinand Bruckner, who had hitherto been known as Tagger in the Berlin theatre ; but if there was a mystery about his name there was none at all about the German success of the play. On a divided stage Elizabeth and Philip of Spain were the protagonists of their countries, each praying for victory ; this was the real drama of *Elizabeth of England* and the rest was the amorous history of Essex and the Queen. Charles Ricketts designed splendid costumes and a simple unit set for the limited stage space of the Cambridge Theatre. The Elizabeth of Phyllis Neilson-Terry was a triumph of voice and authority over physique. Heinz Hilpert, Reinhardt's successor at the Deutsches Theater, came from Berlin to direct ; he spoke no English to help him with the players or the text, but succeeded in repeating his original groupings and effects, although at rehearsal I never saw him seated further back than the fifth row of the theatre. This was the only play to enjoy a run of several months at the Cam-

bridge : at the Haymarket it could certainly have lasted a year. More modestly, the Westminster Theatre under Anmer Hall began this same autumn an enterprise that was to continue for many years and give us a long series of good plays, the first of which was Bridie's *The Anatomist*. All this year I made improvements to the little theatre of the Ballet Club, so that it should be ready for a public opening in due course. And lest at forty-six I should feel inhibited from doing something everybody else could do, I bought a car for the first time and learned to drive it. Then came an invitation, which I accepted at once, to spend the summer of 1932 in San Francisco and talk about theatre as visiting professor in the University of California at Berkeley.

## 14

### CALIFORNIAN SUMMER

To see ahead a prospect of travel that must carry him ten thousand miles, and change his way of life for half a year, and take him more than half out of his profession, is enough to unsettle any man. A writer especially is subject to what the Germans call *Reisefieber*, meaning not so much the unrest of travel itself as the restless thought of it before and after. Actually there is no sort of man who needs unsettling more ; and a writer who knows himself should be aware of it. All this was in my mind at the outset of 1932, when with a play still running from the previous autumn I could survey the progress of my own theatre construction each morning and the plays of fellow-dramatists most evenings of the week, and wonder to what sort of dramatic scene I should eventually return. The panorama unfolded by the outside world was sinister enough. We had suffered a chain of economic collapses on our minor European scale : in the immediate present was some greater American disturbance, vaguely understood on our side : the future darkened as it grew increasingly political.

The plays to be seen in London might well have been portents too. This was the time of Noel Coward's *Cavalcade*, which, in presenting a swift dramatic procession of the years in our own century, reflected also the mood of an England now compelled to read in the huge question-mark of the present a challenge to the validity of all her deeds and hopes. The play was so successful that for years afterwards the stockholders of Drury Lane, the theatre where it was given, used to attend their annual meeting and heckle an apologetic chairman with cries of "Why can't we have another *Cavalcade*?" This is the simple question that the commercial stage is always asking itself, and it is simply answered as a rule by sequences of comedies or musicals, revues or thrillers, all as like as peas. But there was only one time for *Cavalcade*, and that was the season of 1931-32. It was the season also of *Grand Hotel*, an outsize in kaleidoscopic talkies with which for the moment the stage answered the challenge of the screen; and of the return of the Compagnie de Quinze with *La Mauvaise Conduite*, their comedy in masks after Plautus; of Clifford Bax's *The Rose without a Thorn*, which made the fortune of a new dramatic venture; of Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel*; and especially of Reinhardt's production of *Helen* and his revival of *The Miracle*. There were many hopes that the artists leaving the stage of Middle Europe would bring their talent to our own. In this year, too, the Memorial Theatre in Stratford was opened; and never was April on the Avon so bright. The Festival Theatre in Cambridge gained little publicity but much credit by a series of original productions, and formed a rallying-stage for the theatre theatrical.



I sailed away from it all by a ten-day boat to New York, there to spend less than a week before sailing again, this time bound for San Francisco by the Canal. The stock market, in early May of 1932, was at its lowest ever ; people even said that the whole structure of banking and insurance might fall in ruins. Days of sunshine working towards a heat wave accompanied these forebodings ; and forgetting the latitude of New York, I was perplexed by the brevity of my shadow on the sidewalk of Fifty-seventh Street. *Mourning Becomes Electra* had finished its first and notable run, but I was taken once to the theatre to enjoy *Of Thee I Sing*, which as much as *Cavalcade* belonged to that year. I found work to occupy me on the coming voyage of nearly a month ; for Joseph Verner Reed, who had made several productions in previous seasons with Kenneth Macgowan as director, was now planning to present *Bifur* by Simon Gantillon after its outstanding Paris success. He asked me to make the version for him, and I agreed because this strange and sensitive work was the nearest to a poet's play that had come from the professional little theatres of the new France. *Bifur* meant "road fork", perhaps the worst possible English title for a play. I wanted to call it *Tangent*, to express the abrupt spatial divergence of a spirit seeking reincarnation which was the actual theme. The American production eventually was destined to fall through ; but I presented the play in London a year later without a title and with a nameless cast, in the Mercury whose name also had not yet been found. Meantime it was good to have an occupation for my deck chair other than that of reading, which to me is an intensive task for no more than one or two

hours of each day. Writing, on the other hand, is a form of composition involving walks up and down a room or a street or the deck of a ship, a good deal of talking to oneself by way of shaping words into sentences, and now and again a swift resort to writing-pad or typewriter in order to get the words on paper in the least space of time. Writing with a subject ready to hand, which is what it means to adapt a work one likes from another language, is perhaps the ideal occupation and pastime for a theatre man going to sea.

The *Santa Ana*, I think, was the name of our little liner which left a remote Brooklyn pier among the fruit warehouses and turned southward. Her cargo included quantities of coiled barbed-wire, enough to furnish a new trench war on the Western Front, but in fact consigned to American detachments in Nicaragua. Her passengers had to stand aside and make room as they passed on the lower of her two decks ; and clearly there was little they would not know about each other by the end of a month. The boat took about a week of ever-warmer nights with changing stars to bring us from the Atlantic seaboard past the great and small islands of the Indies and across the Caribbean to her first port of call, which was Cristobal on the Isthmus of Panama. We were then in the years of Prohibition, and this garish and ramshackle town just outside the Canal Zone made the most of its liberties, flaunting in particular a saloon where the Glory-Hallelujah Cocktail was said (no doubt libellously) to have been named with approval by Aimee Semple Macpherson, the evangelist. The Canal passage lifted us by immense locks to the high-lying lake which is their reservoir ; and here it was odd to pass liners, freighters

and warships navigating a sheet of water whose trim islets made it look like an ornamental pond in tropical public gardens. The sun in the heavens fantastically reminded us that we were moving eastward through the canal, in fact back towards New York, and not westward as we should have supposed. Alongside our boat in the Cut puffed an absurd train that had picked up laggards from Cristobal, mostly those recovering from the night before. Everybody scanned the banks for alligators. Towards nightfall, as the locks dropped us a step at a time, it was exciting to see the Pacific below, and the lights of Panama City.

In this port we took aboard a circus, which added much to the theatrical pleasure of the voyage. A roundabout and swings with booths and a cage of lions were "discovered", as dramatists used to say, at dawn next morning on the after deck, embarrassingly near the canvas swimming-pool of the little liner; and with them the personnel of the circus who were steerage passengers, all of them in fact except the proprietor and his lady trapeze artists who were first class. The blandishments of the captain's table were unavailing to persuade the trapeze beauties to do their act from mast to mast as we steamed through the Pacific waters; nor would the lion-tamer consent to enter the cage of his charges, to whom ocean travel was distasteful. We parted from the circus at Corinto, where the Spanish-Indian lightermen alongside, after unloading barbed wire from our crane for hours together, were more than surprised by the appearance of lions descending on them from mid-air. Almost as pleasing was the view of the roundabout wafted from the deck with its boats and swans and ponies turning in the

breeze, and finally planted on a barge and rowed ashore.

In Nicaragua and San Salvador there was no chance of going inland ; but from a harbour in Guatemala it was possible to ride by train up-country through coffee plantations and glance at the pyramidal monuments of Central America. Again at Mazatlan, ravaged by earthquake, there was just time to see a dignified church filled with kneeling women in Mexican headgear, a market overflowing with swollen many-coloured vegetables, and a hotel with a tame python, before obeying the purser's orders to re-embark. If this be the life led by pleasure-cruising passengers, I will have none of it. One scrambles aboard at dusk to sail at dawn, after a night of creaking machinery and the scurry of footsteps overhead ; and the lost hours are never retrieved, but accumulate in an accusing void of time.

And so to San Francisco, to pass on a June evening through as yet unspanned Golden Gates into the ultimate harbour of a sailor's quest. Some one beside me on deck had spoken of 1849, and I thought of the handbills broadcast in the streets of Paris to entice all who could pay their passage to the new Eldorado of the Californian goldfield, their treacherous voyage round Cape Horn, their welcome by earthquake and tidal wave in this same Californian port, and their ships that dragged anchor and were cast ashore as wrecks because the crews themselves, infected by gold fever, had abandoned them and gone up-country to burrow in the earth. Here was the city itself towering on steep sandhills above the quays, and across the bay Oakland, and between them a procession of ferry-boats. On these I was to travel daily, living with friends and kinsfolk in the quarter above

Chinatown in San Francisco, descending by cable car daily to the pier, and on the other shore mounting by trolley-car from the industrial waterfront to the serene if arid campus of the University at Berkeley. Life for close on two months proved as agreeable as all these anticipations could forecast. With the help of increasing acquaintances and an Italian bootlegger I was soon acclimatized to San Francisco, though I cannot understand to this day why a city with so mild and equable an air lives so little in the open. At Berkeley I talked to my dramatic classes with all the freedom that an invincible shyness would allow, sometimes resorting to chalk and blackboard rather than face directly the level glance of so many earnest students, including among them two nuns who sat habitually in front. When they were absent one morning I was torn between relief and the fear that I had shocked them ; but I was told, perhaps on imperfect authority, that it was the nuns' day at the swimming-pool. Next day, sure enough, they were back again. I lunched daily with the teaching staff of varied faculties, and through some of them renewed old contacts with the laboratory. Nearly every professor or lecturer I met quoted a Frenchman as saying that America was the only country known to history that had passed directly from barbarism to decadence without an intervening period of civilization ; but as I knew he didn't mean it and was only adopting a self-torturing intellectual pose, I indulged a hearty non-committal laugh every time as if I had never heard the wisecrack before.

Actually there was good reason to value these two months in an American university for the light they threw on the

universal scene. As a scientist by training, and only through avid and various study any sort of scholar, I could enjoy walking on the sunny campus with the thought of all in life and learning that it had to offer. Here a library filled with the treasures of Europe, there a splendidly equipped technical college, and again an institute or a clubhouse or a research laboratory, would repay a visit of hours in company with some specialist in his profession. The wealth of endowment they represented was in itself hugely impressive ; for if industry gives so much to thought, there must surely be a return in planning and service. But I wanted to know also who were the students and what was their background ; how they came about, rather than how much they knew ; why it was that university women, who with us in Europe increase in such numbers the legion of the frustrated, seem to find their American place in a profession or in marriage with such confidence and ease ; what these college boys and girls mean collectively to the rest of the world in which they live ; and whether in fact this Western civilization has made progress toward solving the problem of the separation between culture and chaotic life. In this year 1932 we were all thinking ahead, if we had any ideas at all about the planet on which we lived. The shadows of ignorance in high places were falling across the scene, soon to grow into darkness like that of racial nationalism. Would the college boys and girls be educated and resolved enough to combat this ignorance, or would they be drawn into the inert mass of their fellows and accept the patriot philosophy readiest to hand ? No, these are not speculations after the event. I remember well the discussion of them with what we should

call dons in an English university — grave lean fellows stretched in armchairs looking out on the Californian groves and lawns, and listening, in the silences of the conversation, to the tinkling of the campus stream. Friendships made here and renewed in Europe are things that count.

To look more closely at the scene, drama as understood by an American faculty means theatre and has the status of, say, architecture — including as it does not only the text of the written play but every kind of stagecraft. This breadth of understanding is good in itself, but it does not make for much sympathy between the informed public and the professional stage : they live in two different worlds, and vast physical distances increase the rarity of contact between them. I generally found that university people knew all about the movies, in which they took a cynical but lively interest, and next to nothing about current theatre. This was true of whole cities as well.

In San Francisco at that time the only sign of English-speaking theatre was an occasional visit of a road company, and one of these gave me the chance of seeing Katherine Cornell in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. It was remarkable that the leading Chinese theatre, a modern building on a main street, equipped even with the laundry which tradition requires, should be so little visited by Californians or indeed by any white visitors. In several evenings spent there, I think I never saw any other American or European in the audience ; but the Chinese are courteous folk and no one ever looked at me twice on that account. I cannot say they looked much at the stage either, for they were busied, also traditionally, in holding family tea-parties and reading

newspapers and recalling their children from games of hide-and-seek in the theatre gangways. The dramas performed were period classics accompanied by an orchestra seated on the stage. One dressing-room at least was fully visible through a doorway, and here sat the leading actor looking into his mirror at the audience in front and finishing his make-up as he awaited his entry. On receiving his cue he rose, threw off a dressing-gown, stalked on to the stage, and began to act forthwith. The properties were conventional in the Chinese taste, a couple of chairs serving for the banks of a river and so forth ; but a Western elaboration of scenic background was noticeable here and there. When one of the painted flats toppled it was supported by members of the company, still acting their parts, until property men came on to put it up again. The appearance of a beauty chorus in diaphanous skirts made the young Chinese males of the audience lay aside their evening papers and baseball forecasts to pay attention. At midnight this entertainment, which had begun about seven o'clock, was always briskly proceeding. I was never able to follow the plot of the play, and the acting was rarely distinguished ; but the pattern of the stage in relation to the audience had an enduring charm. I gathered from San Francisco citizens that the plays of the Chinese theatre were regarded as the proceedings of so many children ; which in fact they may have been. Only very tiresome folk will praise Orientalism for its own Oriental sake, or the Chinese stage for its *chinoiserie*.

After one or two excursions down the peninsula, where friends owning vineyards produced the table vintages of California, my stay ended with a visit to the national park



of the Yosemite Valley. Our party drove into it on a moonless night, when only the irregular black-out of stars marked the edge of the cliffs above. Walking before breakfast next morning I met a bear, and afterwards moved circumspectly around the valley slopes. The mountain-tops should have been inviting to a European but somehow were not ; they looked to me like stony skulls to which trees and vegetation adhered with the tenacity of ancient hair. But I saw the giant Sequoia pines, the oldest living things because some of them are rooted in the centuries before Caesar ; and a melancholy Indian Reservation ; and the firefall made by thrusting embers at sundown over a cliff where Indians formerly had kindled their beacon. And with the journey through ruined gold-diggers' villages and the Bret Harte country on the way back to the coast, here was another Californian landscape revealed.

If an Englishman ever needed excuse for a tourist and disinterested visit to Hollywood, he could find it that year in the Olympic Games. The streets were beflagged for them, and even the Hollywood Roosevelt where I stayed seemed to be interested in something beside the stars. I was able to see one British victory at the Games, I think in the quarter-mile, and to jump on my seat and cheer. The studios of Hollywood and their writers and directors, the stages and their players were almost photographically as one had imagined them to be. I cannot remember one surprise in this place, from the Bowl and the super-suburban Beverly Hills to the rich manifold beauty of the women lured by hope from all countries of the world, and the austere expressionless uniformity of their eyes. A sisterhood of the

enclosed ambitious, their nun-like glance told every passer-by that they lived for art alone.

So again by way of a burning Arizona and sweltering Chicago to New York, and thence to Darien in Connecticut, where by day the eye could range over a landscape like that of Kent or Dorset, but the August night, so still in our English counties, was enriched by the symphony of the New England insect world. They sing so much in these parts, a naturalist tried to tell me, because they are more bent on reproduction than insects elsewhere ; but he admitted never having personally known an English cricket. It is just that the nights are warmer. On one of them I was taken to visit Lawrence Langner's playhouse at Westport, one of the first professional out-of-town theatres for the summer season ; and from this visit came the project of a tour of *The Man with a Load of Mischief* with Jane Cowl, realized during the following autumn. I sailed for Europe on the same ten-day boat that had brought me four months earlier to America.

From the time of this Californian summer and the homeward voyage there began for me a life of other journeys than those of theatre, closely bound though they often were ; of meetings and partings in which liner, airfield, station, and again harbour, quay and plane or car alongside were to draw suddenly year by year to some place or scene a focus of utterly personal interest, joyous or bitter, that is not to be shared by more than two people though it is understood by all who have been locked in a close relation of mind and body, and know such a bond to be as incommunicable in inward nature as it must be secret in outward necessity.

London was no sooner reached by way of Brittany than the opportunity offered to go southward again before the autumn. The author of *Bifur*, living on a houseboat in Provence, wanted to talk to me about the version of his play. Provence in late September, even October, is warmer than Northern Europe in midsummer. Early autumn was warm in Paris also, where theatres were opening and I was able to see a new play or two. Then, caring very little and with good reason to what place I should go next, I boarded the Nord-Express on a grey evening and awoke in the chill of Berlin at the coffee-hour next day. The Adlon was housing its tenants of former times, the French Embassy, whose own premises were being redecorated ; and in the room next to mine an indiscreet attaché was telephoning the Quai d'Orsay about *les Boches* as though walls and exchanges had no ears. The atmosphere of the city was at once depressed and hectic : characteristic of the political fever were the crimson headlines of the papers and the groups forming and muttering at street corners. No violence was visibly being done, but I had a more sinister impression than in Leipzig during the inflation of earlier years, when the chatter of machine-guns could be heard almost hourly from some quarter. In the theatre Gerhart Hauptmann's seventieth birthday (I had been present for the sixtieth in Breslau) was well and truly celebrated by the production of one of his Silesian peasant tragedies with that distinguished artist Paula Wessely. Otherwise nothing of note was to be seen. One or two rash satirists were trying to exploit the political situation for stage purposes ; other dull forerunners of the Nazi playwrights were turning to a style which

Polonius might have called the "historico-patriotic". I had journeyed far enough this year without exploring such barren fields as well. It was time to go home, and the plane brought me to Croydon in three hours, to slide out of sunlight through high banks of fog into our familiar autumn ground-mist fed by the smoke of cheerful suburban chimneys.

# 15

## THEATRE OF ONE'S OWN

I shall hold to the title of this chapter, though it has more to do with the European stage than with my activities as producer from 1933 onward. In perspective, the European and not the personal scene is the one that counts. It took me two years of theatre production, always made to please myself and not "the public", before I found a real success; and this I shall come to later under the heading of poetic drama. Meantime I presented a number of plays for limited runs between October and June in each theatre season, while Sunday performances of ballet on the same stage continued without intermission as they were to continue in all for nine years. The vacation months were spent somewhere in Europe, mostly in living but also in writing and studying and visiting festivals or other occasional performances of drama. And since no man could ignore the trend of the world in those years, the record of them is neither theatrical nor personal to the exclusion of a general view. This is actually what I mean by perspective. The European picture of that time was no longer one of isolated artistic

effort, but of a culture contending with external forces and seeking, not always successfully to the spectator's eye, to justify its own survival. This had been the grey picture of Berlin as I came to it after my Californian and Provençal summer of 1932. If such were theatre, one asked oneself why it should survive at all ; and no doubt every capital of the world gave in some degree the same effect of conflict and frustration. For myself, I was glad to have other things than writing to occupy me during weeks and months together ; for this was not a time when a dramatist could sit down each morning calmly and confidently at his desk to create his own picture. Or, if he still found it possible to do so, it was often at the cost of detachment from reality as well as art.

I came back to the London theatre season of 1932-33, which was to give us several fashionable stage movies like *Dinner at Eight*, but also plays of character such as *The Green Bay Tree*, *The Late Christopher Bean* and *Richard of Bordeaux*. If the season was noticeably less Continental than in former years, Paul Robeson and Flora Robson in O'Neill's *All God's Chillun* made the English playgoer more than ever interested in American drama. I was in Paris in the spring to see Jean Giraudoux's *Intermezzo*, and to find Louis Jouvet in his dressing-room clad in a suit of shining black oilcloth, prophesying commercial success for his dramatist with a certain sadness because he knew it would carry him and his own company of artists out of the little professional theatre to which they belonged, and on to the Boulevards which had other standards of taste. All his forecasts for Giraudoux were more than fulfilled, and this writer took his place in

the next few years as dramatic interpreter of the modern French spirit. His gay reconstructions of themes from antiquity were gifts to the player and director because of their sureness of theatrical appeal ; and the playgoer liked them because with all their bawdy wit they remained fine in perception, intellectual but never controversial. Giraudoux was no Shaw, but he sustained the Voltairean tradition. It will be sad if we have to go on speaking of him in the past.

Later in 1933, and appropriately brought to London at the time of a world economic conference that was to achieve nothing, came the Ballet Jooss with a satire on world conferences called *The Green Table*, which had carried off the prize at an international festival of dance in Paris. The name of Ballet was forced upon the Jooss company from lack of an equivalent for *Tanzbühne* (dance-stage or dance-theatre) in the French or English language. Kurt Jooss, its director, wanted to express thoughts and to create pictures of life in the round through the medium of dance alone. He admitted a debt to ballet technique, but his real impulse came from expressionism in dance, painting, music and perhaps literature. This was not the sort of enterprise to draw away the fashionable public from the Ballets Russes who had reformed their company and returned to London ; but the company had its own vigour and integrity, and over a period of years it has educated the theatre in a knowledge of what dance unaided can do.

My next experience of this year was attending the opening performance in Salzburg of *Faust*, given in the arcaded courtyard next to the Festival Playhouse. This had been a riding-school of the prince-archbishops of the city ; and

Reinhardt had long wanted to make dramatic use of it for open-air performances, using a multiple stage formed by the arcades which were mostly hewn out of the living rock. Accordingly the whole rear wall of the courtyard became an architectural unit of platforms, open chambers and galleries on which Goethe's tragedy (Part One) was to be given. In case of bad weather the open-air performance, like the production of *Everyman* which was still regularly made in the cathedral square, was transferable to the building next door ; but the rehearsals were conducted day after day in August sunshine, and they were complicated enough in themselves without envisaging alternative movements and sequences that would be needful for a regular stage production. Showers on the day of the première aroused misgivings, but it was too late to do more than hope for the best. During a bright evening interval the spectators from all over the world, suitably attired for a great occasion, filed into their places carrying leather cushions as protection against slightly damp seats. Some also carried umbrellas, which were rather frowned upon. The rich variety of the scene became evident after the first passages between Faust and the Mephistopheles played by Max Pallenberg. The lighting passed from stage to stage ; crowds appeared and faded from view like the solitary figures in cells or at case-ments. We had just come to the opening scene of Gretchen (Paula Wessely) when the first umbrellas went up, to go down again amid cries of disapproval and a lessening of the shower. They went up again in numbers as a steady rainfall set in, then people began to leave. The rest of us were uncertainly trying to keep our attention on the play when a



thunderclap and a real Salzburg cloudburst washed us out. Rivers ran down the tiers of seats to form pools in front, near the main exit, to which white-waistcoated cavaliers waded with ladies limp in their arms. My record of it ended "and let us hope that before next year the German frontier will be reopened and the spirit of Salzburg will be unclouded by dark politics : that preoccupation does more to damp the Festival than any thunder shower". But our Austria, as home and playground, was in her last unhappy years.

Just over the mountains and on the sunny side of them, in Venice a fortnight later, one could sit in the courtyard of the Doge's Palace towards midnight to see *Othello* played under the stars by an Italian touring company of no great acting merit, but directed by an artist sure of his climate and showman enough to make use of his setting. The notion of seeing the Moor in Venice was in itself alluring ; for one had too often looked in a production of the play for an authentic Venetian bridge or a flight of waterside steps. Actually the bridge was almost the only piece of theatrical scenery that it was necessary to build for this presentation in the courtyard, whose own splendid flight of steps and galleries were made to break the levels of the stage and serve for crowd movements. The weathered statuary looked down as decoration, and Iago could come into the audience to speak his soliloquies, leaning over a well-head illumined from within. One of the open squares of Venice could be suggested by a space on to which the players swarmed to whisper in little knots, suddenly quitting it again to run through lanes or into gateways for such a movement as the

warning given to Brabantio. The scene of the Council grew from a procession of banners and insignia, which when drawn aside revealed the Doge, enthroned among the senators. One Pietro Sciaroff, who contrived all this, seemed to have learned from Reinhardt some of his aptitude in the play of crowd gesture or the sudden flash of steel. And in the early morning hours, when the performance ended but the city was still awake and the Piazza San Marco with its tables not yet deserted, one could feel that *Othello*, however good its Moor or Desdemona, would never live with such intensity again.

If I remember, one of the objectives of this Italian journey was an exhibition of modern art and craftsmanship at Milan, which the Government were so eager to see visited that they would almost fetch the tourist by force from another country, paying most of his fares and giving him a bonus on his hotel bills. All he had to do to enjoy these benefits was to go to Milan ; and there sure enough were flags of the nations and exhibition buildings and neat little functional villas poured out in concrete, covered with dazzling white plaster and furnished with all the modern appliances for living, dining and begetting a family to grow up and colonize Africa. Alas, the Government's beneficence was wasted, for it did not know that the real objectives of a visit might be the Cathedral and Leonardo's *Cena*. After seeing them, it was pleasanter to quit the hot city of Milan and to leave the country by way of Genoa and the coast, to sit awhile in the cafés of Marseilles and be nourished on *bouillabaisse* in the places overlooking the inner harbour. Here I learned from the English papers of the imminence of a revival of my

Haymarket comedy at the Westminster ; and I had also to think of my own autumn opening and its rehearsals. So, with a few hours' halt to dine in a town where you, dear reader, may never have alighted, though you have sleepily looked out to see its name on a signal-box or heard the milk-cans that are rolled melodiously down its platform in the early morning hours, the journey had to be continued to Paris where the season had not yet begun.

The first impression of London that autumn was of more open-air theatre ; for if Faust had resorted to the baroque courtyards of Salzburg and Othello had invaded Venice, here was Bottom strutting it and falling into slumbers of enchantment on the lawns of Regent's Park. Was that summer of 1933 so rich in sunshine or other magic that it brought out all of them together ? My cellar-book tells me the year was good for most wines ; in fact one of the best of the few remaining vintage years. Sydney Carroll, who presented *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the open, was to enjoy sunny seasons again, and to give much pleasure to old and young, as the saying goes, by his Park performances. On really warm evenings he could rely on a full house, and in all weathers on a congregation of moths and some scattered birds seeking to roost undisturbed by floodlights and amplifiers. As time went on and R.A.F. planes began their night operations overhead, open-air theatre was less placid ; but otherwise no one could deny the delight of being stretched in a deck-chair and listening to Shakespeare and especially inhabiting for a while the wood near Athens. In the logic of art I certainly prefer theatre to be theatre, with a designed scene instead of trees and bushes in the background, and this

condition had been very largely fulfilled at Salzburg or Venice where works of art formed the decoration ; but there is a mood with which the open air of garden or park-land accords very well, given the right performance.

The revival of my comedy lasted only a few weeks, and *Jupiter Translated*, which W. J. Turner had made into English verses from Molière's *Amphitryon*, had a very modest run at the Mercury. *A Sleeping Clergyman* by Bridie, which I had seen in Malvern during a fleeting visit that summer before Salzburg, settled down as one of the season's successes. The Old Vic, thanks to the self-sacrificing presence of Charles Laughton and other famous artists in the company, was doing better than at any time of late, and both *Twelfth Night* and *The Cherry Orchard* filled it to overflowing. I found time in November to fly to Berlin, attend a round of theatres for myself, and try to form some sort of judgment of drama and direction under the first phase of Nazi rule. For the scene of arrival, my own account at the time may serve best : " here suddenly was Berlin glittering below, fully lighted in the dusk, a pattern of *Kino* signs and advertisements concentrating in the glare of the Kurfürstendamm. Tilted at the angle of our flight, the city seemed at one moment to fill a part of the sky and not the earth — its churches, chimneys, factories luminous and foreshortened, a fantastic panorama of a metropolis. Like a floodlit stage in this theatre of optical sensation, the airport loomed and spread to receive us . . . and ten minutes later here were the Brandenburg Gate and Unter den Linden, hung with flimsy streamers proclaiming sentiments of honour, duty and the like, which seemed to be connected, like most appeals

of their kind even in the less enlightened democratic countries, with a forthcoming election."

On the first evening I ran across a movie house in the Friedrichstrasse where *Cavalcade* was being shown, and was astonished to find it described as a "sound-film with 10,000 soldiers, 4 troops of cavalry, 50 cannon, 8000 weapons, 3 Zeppelins, 1000 horses, 200 motor cars". So Hollywood had not done its work upon Noel Coward's peaceable script in vain; it had satisfied the longing of Germans (or at least the official longing) to see all these instruments of destruction. Not far off was a public war museum made out of a store, where for a few pfennigs one could walk through papier-mâché trenches and peer out of machine-gun posts at rusty barbed wire. This was in queer contrast to the calm of the streets, from which beggars and prostitutes had alike vanished, and the calm of the press which still came out under a dozen different names where one would have sufficed; not to speak of the calm of the theatre with more than half the houses closed at what would normally be the busiest time of year. Somebody explained to me that the stage had not yet been organized, meaning that no successors had been appointed to replace Reinhardt, Piscator, Barnovsky and the rest. A more malicious wit told me the stage had been liquidated but had not yet solidified; which is the kind of thing Berliners say to each other in cafés all day long and are afraid to say openly, so that they get the form of government they deserve.

It was easy to understand that nearly every dramatist of standing must be suspect; for if not a Jew he was almost certainly a "culture-bolshevist" or merely a writer

successful under the Republic and in possession of ill-gotten royalties. The whole of theatre life had to start again from the beginning, and I was privileged in this autumn to see it get off the mark. One of my experiences was *Kräch um Iolanthe*, a racy country farce about a sow (Iolanthe) seized from a farmer for debt, put in a police station for safety, and liberated by one of the suitors for the hand of the farmer's daughter. The author of this stuff performed at the classical Lessing Theater was not exactly a Synge, but he was a good master-carpenter of sixty, and his father had been a master-carpenter before him ; and many worse men have written or put together plays. The live sheep, goats, pigs and poultry let loose upon the stage were borrowed from various establishments and from the Zoo near by. Then I went to a former railway station made into a popular theatre, the Plaza, which was giving an aged operetta but was interesting in itself, because it manifested, with an auditorium holding 3000, the strength of the movement toward mass entertainment. The older people's theatre corresponding to our Old Vic, the Volksbühne, had forgotten its political past and was giving Schiller's *Maria Stuart* under Heinz Hilpert's direction with the minor men's parts, courtiers and the like, played by actors who had been stage footmen with Reinhardt. Overplaying and ranting were conspicuous. But in a State-subsidized theatre like the Schauspielhaus the old traditions were maintained, and one could see good acting and direction at the service of the new "blood and earth" drama.

Playgoing in the smaller theatres around Berlin's West End was more speculative, and one could easily stumble on

some naïve piece of dramatic journalism where a Jew, the villain of course, was beaten up before vanishing from the scene. This would be played before an audience largely made up of "Strength through Joy" members at reduced prices ; and the masochistic artist concerned was able to get home early with his bruises, for the public would never wait longer than a couple of acts to see retribution overtake him. There were no demonstrations in the house, and one heard very little applause. Everything was taken for granted with appalling calm ; these people knew that no more than one opinion would be expressed by stage, press or platform. And in the homeward plane sailing over Hanover to Holland and the North Sea, I could only think how manifold is what we call a lifetime to-day. The Germany where I had studied was already as remote as if it had existed in another century ; and so were now the Germanies of the Armistice and the Republic. But a Berlin friend who had met me cautiously in the back rooms of cafés or confectioner's shops, because he was already being watched, said that we should see several more phases, each worse than the present, before we had done. This would stretch out the number of lifetimes within a lifetime still further ; and I shivered as the height of the plane approaching the sea made it needful to reach for a second greatcoat.

Soon 1934 was here, and with it a revival of theatre quite notable considering the progress of the screen. It was a players' revival, for new dramatists were fewer than ever. Artists of the standing of Bergner, the Lunts, Yvonne Printemps, Edith Evans and Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Laughton and John Gielgud and Gertrude Lawrence made it clear by

choice of work that they sought stage engagements first of all, and would struggle at personal loss to retain them, and considered the movies as a secondary art. With some of them this was a last gesture, for soon after making it they turned to the screen for good. But it was bravely made all the same, and it brought multitudes of people to see the plays which were vehicles for such talents. The dramatists, however, from Shakespeare to Shaw and Sherwood, could not prevent the movement from being short-lived. Some sentiment apart, nothing actually united the famous player to the stage except the writer's inspiration continually renewed and continually interpreted afresh by direction. In a little while we were back in a period of stage fashions like that of reviving Congreve and Wycherley on their bawdy merits. I was out of the theatre fashion in staging Becque's *Parisienne*, which was now due to celebrate the fiftieth year of its performance by the Comédie Française, and out of the social fashion with Kataev's Soviet comedy *Squaring the Circle*. But we had a success with a summer season of the Ballet Rambert, which made it needless for me to stay in London ; and another event loomed ahead in the first night of *Vintage Wine*, a farce which I was alleged to have written jointly with Seymour Hicks (he is a great comedian and likes to make this kind of joke). I decided to send my cable of good wishes to the Hicks company from Berlin : it would have been too late coming from Oberammergau, which was my real destination. And so, making the flight on the day when the farce was due, I found myself back again at the Adlon for the second time in six months, and watching an imposing march of sailors through the



Brandenburg Gate to the Jutland memorial.

Between the approach of midsummer and a delightful production at the Staatstheater, Berlin seemed a pleasanter place than usual. The play was a baroque *Comedy of Errors* very freely adapted by Hans Rothe, another joker with his public since he put it all down to Shakespeare. In refashioning the play from the original and not from the classical German version, Rothe had made it a comedy of character in which the Dromios and their masters, and especially Adriana and Luciana, might have stepped from any witty and subtle drama of to-day into the maze of Ephesian intrigue. Their reactions to it were logical and intelligent, and this was the mainspring of the comic effect. The explanations came at the end and not at the beginning as with Shakespeare ; and an ingenious direction and staging diminished the physical field of action as the play went on, so that the frontage of the house of Antipholus came nearer and nearer down the sloping stage, scene after scene, until it became a simple drop-curtain. From pure enchantment with this work I took the adaptation in hand again, and we made two London productions of it in the following years. It is now called *They Wander in a Maze*, and gin-and-Ephesian and gin-and-Syracusan are both served at the Porcupine, to which house (you will remember) Antipholus of Ephesus resorts to dine with "mine hostess" when he finds his own home barred against him. Meantime America had rediscovered the Comedy of Errors theme in the *Boys from Syracuse* as a musical and screen play ; but the Rothe version is nearer the entertainment that Plautus and Shakespeare set out to offer.

I had never seen the Passion Play of Oberammergau, which was specially given in 1934 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of its foundation. Legend says that plague was averted from the village by a vow to perform the drama of Christ's life and death every ten years ; and the sequence would have been 1930 and 1940 in the ordinary course. It could be guessed that the 1934 series of performances would be the last in the lifetime of many of us ; and here was a reason for taking the opportunity now. The stage is in the open air, and the background of its architectural setting is formed by the mountainside ; but the spectators are covered by the span of an unsightly modern auditorium, which in this year was flying the swastika flag, in defiance, it was believed, of the players' wishes. I had not realized that the Play itself would be so much dominated by the Passion Chorus of singers. They intone a text devoid of poetic merit either in German or translation ; but many spectators follow the drift of the chant from a printed copy in their own language, and so the ritual character of the performance is much heightened. The chorus leader was Anton Lang, world-known as a former Christus, and his gift of presence was inspiring. Alois Lang, the Christus, had great presence also, but it was of a kind too elemental to give significance to scenes which were not full of strong action, such as the driving-out of the money-changers or the trial before Pilate. As they have always done by tradition, the peasants of the village raised the Play on the shoulders of their own simplicity and made every crowd scene memorable. To see this drama lasting seven hours one spent two nights in lodging with a peasant or woodcarver and supping at his

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

table, then sleeping perhaps above a manger or workshop. Such nights of quiet are a part of the experience of Oberammergau, like the train journey back to Munich on the third day at dawn, when the roe-deer of these highlands are feeding out in the open, presently to steal one after another into a thicket or the fringe of a wood.

## 16

### ROME EXPRESS

Here was high summer of 1934 and with it the opening of Glyndebourne Opera House, the wing of a country mansion in a fold of the Sussex Downs. In building it John Christie made one of the gestures of the remaining peaceful years. And I see no reason to change the view expressed of it then : " This opera house is an accretion to a history of civilization that to-morrow may try to sweep away, yet it belongs to an aristocracy of taste that must endure through wars and revolutions. Mozart will be played in this house long after the material conditions of the Glyndebourne Festival have been changed beyond knowledge." This can be considered as sure as the blooming of the same flowers in the gardens of Glyndebourne and the survival of the same wooded prospect from the terrace ; and what was a rich man's plaything will not in the end be his Folly. The singers of Salzburg, many of them refugees from their own stages, were brought over in numbers, so that from now onward the English lover of Mozart had little reason to seek his festivals abroad.

It may have been some minor and humble echo of Glyndebourne that made me prepare a new autumn entertainment in *Vauxhall Gardens*, a blend of intimate opera and ballet as they might have been performed (between fireworks and balloon ascents) in the old pleasure gardens across the Thames. But I was called away from its rehearsal to go to Rome for the *Convegno Volta*, a congress held every two years and endowed by the inventor of the voltaic cell "for the consideration of some branch of science or art". This year it was the turn of theatre to be considered, and theatre men from all countries were to be brought to Rome by the Italian Government for the purpose. Whether they came from near or far in Europe, Italy took charge of them from the moment when they stepped aboard the Rome Express. W. B. Yeats had come from Ireland with Mrs. Yeats, who asked me whether one of the leather cases in my baggage really contained a top-hat : she had her wifely social misgivings about the poet's broad-brim soft felt, under which his grey mane flowed so magnificently. He was himself rather concerned as a Senator for the prestige of Ireland, where hats are as important as anywhere else and even more varied ; but Mrs. Yeats settled the question by declaring that "Willie never really looks his best in a top-hat", and he was persuaded to agree.

America was represented only by correspondents in Paris and Rome ; and to talk about the present and future stage without having the viewpoint of American artists was a handicap admitted by most of us. In Paris we were joined by dramatists like Jules Romains and Denys Amiel and by a group of Netherlanders and Scandinavians. Genoa brought

aboard more theatre folk from the north and east, so that a lively company arrived at the Roman station to be greeted by Italians as various as Pirandello, Marinetti the Futurist, and Silvio d'Amico, a man and artist friendlier even than his name if that were possible. We who were writers knew only too well that other theatre workers were much less free than ourselves to run about Europe in October, which is the busiest month of the international stage. The number of active directors especially was limited ; but Copeau sent an envoy, and Tairov represented the Soviet cultural organization as well as his own Kamerny Theatre in Moscow, and Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus in Dessau, who has since become professor of architecture in Harvard, stood much less officially but with as great distinction for the Germany he was about to leave.

This gathering was significant in 1934, when the stage could be calmly reviewed by its own people after thirty years of the screen and seven years of sound-film. To-day, after another seven years, it seems more significant than even at that time ; for although meanwhile the theatre has made no great gesture, the issues that concern it have become clearer. To take only one of them, there is the main question of policy : whether the stage should withdraw from all rivalry with the screen by doing nothing on its own boards that the screen can do as well, or collaborate freely with the screen as it is doing to-day even at the cost of becoming quite subordinate, or begin building playhouses on a new and different plan designed for the special effect (possibly the mass-effect) of living performance. The first course would soon mean the retirement of the theatre to the

back street where it would seek the patronage of a small but cultivated public ; and this was favoured even in 1934 by some dramatists. The second can be defended for reasons of expediency, but means nothing to theatre art. The third, naturally tempting to architects with new ideas, and still more to political men, would open up extraordinary vistas ranging from the rebirth of ritual drama (including political drama as it is understood in totalitarian countries) to the growth of a new spectacular drama with resources in machinery, lighting and sound effect that have never yet been brought into play. I think the choice between them was the major issue faced by the Convegno Volta at its Roman gathering, even though some older delegates from Maeterlinck to Craig would not admit the part the screen had played in forcing it upon us. The producing managers of Broadway and Shaftesbury Avenue, who were not represented and indeed would not have known what any theatre congress was about, were the only theatre men who could be imagined as supinely awaiting events. Observers in Rome could follow a sharp conflict, like that of a political struggle, between the need of the individual dramatist to express himself in his own way and the impulse of the theatre to master the machines and use all its dynamic power.

Actually this theatre problem could not have been faced more aptly than in Rome, whose architectural vistas no longer offer a view of "ruins" but speak to the present in its own direct language. On every hand in this Roman background which itself is theatre, the eye could follow the uprising in centuries of new structural forms based upon new powers, perhaps of new machines, always of new dis-

covery and recreation, until now the bare stones are themselves discovered with a fresh significance. And this was not necessarily the Rome of fascism that we viewed, but the Rome of modern thought. Gerhart Hauptmann in sending his greetings to the Convegno had rightly reminded us that our problem to-day resembled that of the antique world in being always dynamic and not static. More had happened to human culture, as he said, during the time between the assembly of the first players of drama on a Greek hillside and the building of the Coliseum, than during the time between Nero's Rome and Mussolini's. Neither new forms nor new machines were arising for the first time to challenge drama, which itself can be no stable fact but must be a process of creation. These thoughts were bound to be in mind as we moved through Old Rome on daily well-organized excursions, or wandered at our own will through the Coliseum or drove in the Appian Way by moonlight ; but especially as we met for each morning session in the well-named Sala dei Prospettivi, the hall in the Palazzo della Farnesina on the Tiber bank. The symbol of perspective summed up all that theatre had accomplished and now desired.

I hugely enjoyed the other Rome too : the Rome where English ladies " winter " at a certain age, if they have the means to winter anywhere but at Bournemouth ; the Rome where incredible old gentlemen with white side-whiskers go driving ass-carts through the gardens of the Pincio and saluting acquaintances on every hand ; where pleasant luncheon parties are given at the British Embassy, or evening receptions at which debutantes, nieces of the ladies who are



wintering, flirt with Italian officers in the Embassy garden under the walls which are the old walls of the city ; where people have time for cafés and newspapers and looking at the passers-by ; where cats wear ribbons and children trundle coloured hoops and tenors sing and beggars are not ashamed of beggary. Maybe nothing will be like this again, all may indeed have been changed in these seven years ; but I am glad to have seen what may be called the Rome of tourist romance. Into this city I sallied forth each morning from my hotel, summoning from the cab-rank irrespective of precedence a driver with a white horse ; upon which the cry of *cavallo bianco* was echoed up the line of cabmen as if mine were the most reasonable predilection in the world ; and the proud Giuseppe, who told me his name at our first meeting (also the name of his horse Benito), pulled his cab out of the rank and trotted up to the hotel door eager to see if I were wearing my top-hat assumed for ceremonial visits to the Capitol and the like. If so, he insisted on taking me for an extended drive through all quarters of the city, where on passing another cab he would point to me with his whip and say that I not only wore this hat but insisted on a white horse every morning. He would have driven me out to the vineyards of the Campagna, to which he himself belonged and where many of his kind were bestriding their asses and carrying home their wine-skins at this season ; but there it was, oats were limited, the authorities frowned on horse-cabs altogether, and I should have to take a car.

Rolling along in the sunshine behind Giuseppe and Benito I remembered Arnold Bennett, novelist and dramatist, and his tale that in going to Rome for the first time, he

ventured into the Coliseum by moonlight feeling it was the proper thing to do, and met among the shadows a short man with a pointed beard whom he had little trouble in identifying as Hall Caine, author of *The Eternal City*. The chieftain of best-sellers greeted him with the embarrassing query, "A fellow-Briton, I believe?" and on his admitting the offence, enquired very civilly his errand in Rome and his profession. Bennett had to plead guilty to writing various tales of the Five Towns in the English Black Country of which his host had at least heard, for after a meditative silence he said, "Wonderful, is it not, that here we should meet, two authors known throughout the world, among these monuments, in this eternal city". The last phrase, said Bennett, seemed almost involuntarily to escape him: perhaps it was a gesture from a major to a minor best-seller. I hope this tale is not too malicious to be retold, for it seems to me as entertaining as that of one of the richest bookmakers of the English Turf, who had always spent his holidays at Monte Carlo until a friend asked him, "Sam, why do you always come to Monte? Why don't you try some other spot like Rome?" After this Sam was absent from the tables for a while; but when he returned and was asked, "Well, Sam, how did you like Rome?" he answered, "You can have Rome!"

After such piecemeal glances at the Roman scene, it would be an affectation to ignore the tremendous panorama of Vatican City as it reveals itself to a man walking through the gateway nearest the Tiber and following a narrow street to St. Peter's. I was already overawed by a procession of young Irish candidates for the priesthood, looking otherwise

just as one frequently sees them on English racecourses, who marched in what seemed to be an ecstatic column of fours along the roadway beside me, when the full view opened out and there stood the Cathedral with the quadruple colonnades and the great flight of steps, the pigeons and the post-card-sellers and the Swiss Guards ; and although myself nothing but a pagan insect crawling unawares upon the scene, I was seized as though by superhuman power and compelled to go forward, upward, through ever-greater porticos and over ever-vaster pavements and around infinite transepts, choirs and cloisters, into the sunlight again to say to myself, breathless after the breath of incense, that it was all just as I had imagined it to be, only more enormous. It has been said that the difference between the English and French translations of the Bible is that " Behold leviathan " in one language is rendered as " Voici l'hippopotame " in the other. This is probably a malicious invention ; but however leviathan is named he is magnificently seen on the Tiber bank within his walls. After the ceremonies of noon I was not long in discovering the excellence of food and wine in Vatican City, which spreads a whole amphitheatre of houses of refreshment around the sublime stage of its principal square. And always afterwards, when delegates to the Convegno complained of the dearth of restaurants in Rome, I was able to ask, " But have you tried Vatican City ? "

And now it is time to return to the Convegno Volta, for over coffee and brandy, looking still at the prodigy of St. Peter's, I realize that I have played truant for the whole morning from a discussion of " the theatre in the moral life

of the nations ". This is no great matter, for Marinetti, who has also contrived to lunch well, opens the proceedings in the afternoon with a violent polemic addressed to all decadent peoples whoever they may be (we suspect the French, who are showing signs of nerves). Yeats has gone quietly to sleep, and Craig is dozing with the half-closed lids of a lion who may at any time awaken. Nobody wants to discuss the question of dramatic censorship, least of all the Russian delegate whose eyes merely twinkle when it is raised. It is simpler to speak of the assistance given by the State to the theatre in various countries, in fact with the sole exceptions of Britain and America. Ireland awakens to say that the Abbey Theatre in Dublin is subventioned and yet preserves that aristocracy of thought and tradition of letters which must for ever be opposed to conceptions of mass-theatre. Gropius again propounds the scheme of his *Totaltheater*, which is not entirely architectural but embodies the idea of everybody's theatre and auditorium and stage, where every form of presentation can be made. Josef Gregor, the practical scholar of the dramatic collection in the Viennese National Library, ranges over the theatrical arena from the theatre of Epidaurus to the projects of Norman Bel Geddes and Oskar Strnad. Copeau thinks that man as seen by Molière, always reasonable, always open to conviction, determined the nature of theatre's place in life. We must make ourselves as little children, but very intelligent little children, before the human spectacle which is the spectacle of the stage.

That afternoon was memorable in any case because suddenly into the debate fell a bombshell; a Jugo-Slav

monarch had been assassinated in Marseilles and nobody yet knew which Power had been the instigator. The delegates of the bereaved country received general condolences and we adjourned for the day : it was fortunate that our next engagement was to be a visit to the Villa d'Este and another of the dead country houses near Tivoli, with their excavated theatres. Then was to follow the gala performance rather dreaded by all who know such occasions, as much for the stuffed character of the audience as the waxwork exhibition on the stage. But there it was, we had been talking of theatre for some days and now we had to see what modern Rome could do. The event exceeded the forebodings of Tairov and myself, for we sat together in Anglo-Soviet harmony and compared notes of our expectations and the actual fact. The Duce made his appearance in a box, after the entry had been well prepared by the cries of generals from other boxes. The pitiable presentation on the stage consisted of D'Annunzio's *La Figlia di Iorio*, directed by Pirandello and played by Marta Abba and a cast of Roman talents. The main trouble was that the entire performance could have been given in the year 1900. Much more modest and at the same time more delightful was the only other play being given in Rome, which was a modern vehicle designed for that admirable comedian Petrolini. From this state of things in the month of October we could readily understand that Rome itself is not a theatre city.

And here is an opportunity to glance at what has happened to drama, direction, scene and architecture in the seven years since the Convegno met. The group of Continental dramatists led by the French, who spoke of forming a

defensive square around the theatre of imagination and guarding it with the devotion of their lives, have seen their own stages yearly grow smaller and their audiences dwindle away, until a stroke of violence destroyed freedom of mind and theatre together. Only in Britain and America, in these years, have the smaller theatres known how to defend themselves and to produce, here and there, fragments of a new dramatic poetry including the interpretation of modern life in verse. Direction has followed the same course as drama, if only for the reason that these were years unsuited to large-scale adventure. There has been the same sharp division between the English-speaking countries and the rest : many stage directors everywhere have gone over to the screen, but those holding to the stage have been far from losing credit. Nobody now disputes that direction can be creative, and in many forms of drama must be so. Scene and architecture have been undeveloped except in the immense open-air arenas created by some countries for mass-performance, where ancient or medieval arenas were not available ; and these may be the forerunners of covered playhouses on the same gigantic scale, where microphones will bring every word to the listener. The project put forward by Gropius for uniting in a single structure the three main forms of dramatic architecture — the arena, the semicircular theatre with proscenium, and the proscenium theatre with curtain — and making a part of the forestage and auditorium revolve in order to get the right form of theatre for the drama in hand, remains a project. But we may hear more of this imaginative scheme for rebuilding the simplicity of theatre on the foundation of the machine.

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

Perhaps the only wasted day of our labours in Rome — and I have recorded pious use of part of it — was that devoted to our influence upon “the moral life of the nations”, which now seems more chimerical than any theatre ambition. Year by year since that time one has been able, like a man stricken and putting affairs in order, to reckon what could be done in the little space left in which to do it. My own love of Italy, already going far beyond the mountains of the North and Venice and the Lombard cities, had been quickened by the Roman Campagna ; and I knew the truth, that this country has everything in nature and in art to complete the life of a man. So on the way homeward by way of Pisa I could still pass that tempting branch to Florence and look forward to summer in Tuscany before it grew too late ; and this promise was to be fulfilled. I see Siena and the Palio yet before me in another chapter of this European tale. But first let me come to poetic drama, the development of our stage at home concerning me most nearly.

# 17

## POETIC DRAMA

THE event of the season 1934-35 was the run of *Hamlet* with John Gielgud in the West End. The actor had already played the part at the Old Vic. Many playgoers felt that he had joined the traditional line of Hamlets ; for this is how people have grown used to thinking about the play. They like to see a new Prince of Denmark, otherwise a Moody Dane, once or twice in a generation so that they can compare him with Irving or Forbes-Robertson, Moissi or John Barrymore. They assume that the play itself stands still and bears little relation to our own life, full of quotations though it may be ; but they cheer the actor as he surges forward in his career, an established figure because he has played his Hamlet with success. And in doing such homage to the greatest of plays through the actor of the greatest of parts, they go far to justify the bitter saying that but for Shakespeare Britain might have a poetic drama.

The corollary is that what poetic drama we have had, in times within memory, has been much too Shakespearean. Few, perhaps, will now recall the imposing iambic dramas



of Stephen Phillips, which used to fill His Majesty's and allow Beerbohm Tree, as he then was, to appear as Herod, Nero or what-not. (There was an embarrassing occasion when Tree showed them to Berlin.) Rudolf Besier began his career with a verse drama, *The Virgin Goddess*. Hardy's *The Dynasts*, brought piecemeal into the theatre by the devoted and superhuman effort of Granville-Barker, was outstanding in the First Great War. Most of the Irish poets preferred prose when they were writing for the stage, but Sean O'Casey as a prose writer made his own original experiments in dramatic verse. Gordon Bottomley and Laurence Binyon were among the established poets who had plays performed. John Drinkwater used dramatic verse as well as prose. Flecker's *Hassan* has been recorded as the high-light of all this Edwardian and Georgian drama seeking the form of poetry. Now in 1934 came what might be called the primitives of a new school in W. H. Auden's *The Dance of Death* given by the Group Theatre, and T. S. Eliot's *The Rock*. Their breakaway from established forms reminded us that the five-footed iambic, Marlowe's line, had been the bane of most of their predecessors. But we had few critics bold enough to tell the dramatists to cast it off and listen to the rhythms of speech to-day, then to make new stresses and metres for themselves. The longer the inhibitive influence of the Elizabethans persisted, as it still persists, the more the time was ripe for change. In the perspective of the years since 1934, we can see how the awareness of these things has spread among writers for the stage in Britain and America alike.

The *Hamlet* with John Gielgud came opportunely, for it

differed from others of our generation in understanding of drama rather than in quality of playing. I wrote after seeing the performance : " His most satisfying gesture is a withdrawal into that princely solitude which is a thing of universal though rare experience. Speaking always to himself as Hamlet must, whether in soliloquy or otherwise, the actor conveys the conversation of mind with mind so that the most familiar line comes with an element of surprise, freshly-wrought although inevitable. Why, we ask ourselves, should not the man of to-day speak so to himself and to others — in verse and prose, these images of theatre speech that are a hundred times more natural than the words of common use ? Why should to-day's man, agonizing in drama, employ an utterance other than this we call poetic ? Why indeed should poetry on the stage be an archaism at all ? What has it to do with old times, Danish or Celtic, Italian or Greek ? Should it not be the necessary language of our own dynamic world ? " I see from the words " agonizing " and " dynamic " that I was still echoing the thought of our congress in Rome ; but otherwise the impression holds good. Gielgud's Hamlet, to me, meant modern verse-drama and the verse-drama of modern life. And I would add that the actor triumphed largely through his humour, which is as essential an element in the mind of the tragedian as gloom is said to be in the spirit of the clown.

Soon afterwards, in the early months of 1935, I was discussing with W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot and E. Martin Browne who had directed *The Rock*, a project for a Mercury season of plays by poets. The simplicity of presentation was to be such that no backer would be needed : I would

take the responsibility myself as always on my own little stage. The Group Theatre might be willing to join, in course of time, by lending us its own plays and playwrights, Louis Macneice as well as W. H. Auden and his collaborator Christopher Isherwood. Meantime Eliot had written an unnamed play about Becket, to be given in the summer in the chapter-house of Canterbury by the Friends of the Cathedral, who were raising a permanent fund for the preservation of the fabric and invited writers and other artists to contribute in medieval fashion with their gifts. We felt that this would not preclude a production of Eliot's play as part of our project, perhaps in alternation with a play by Yeats ; but it was the sensible course to let Canterbury, for whom the play had been written, perform it first, and then to consider it as the opening work for an autumn season at the Mercury. I recall very well a description of the yet unfinished play : the drama of the life and death of Becket was in verse, but the four knights who murdered him, all perfect Nazis, were to step out on to the forestage and hold a public meeting with the audience, explaining the various secular or totalitarian grounds that had made their action necessary. Here, again, humour had come to the aid of a modern poet treating the most classical of English tragic themes.

So in June of 1935 I was at Canterbury for the production of *Murder in the Cathedral*, as the play was called at the suggestion of a shrewd woman who knew how to express its contemporary spirit in a title. No theatre folk were visible around the city, no producing managers from the West End had come to see a work by the foremost poet of his

generation. The movement of the time was lost upon them ; and in fact the resistant power of the theatre is such that they would not even believe in its eventual success when this came about. One eminent critic avoided seeing it at all because he was sure it would bore him.

The chapter-house of Canterbury is a long narrow Gothic hall opening from the cloister, and it would be hard to find a building less suited, at a glance, to dramatic performance. About 700 people seated on rush chairs were crammed on either side of a narrow middle gangway. The stage was a platform with slight but appropriate scenic decoration. As they played their tragedy, the actors were separated only by a wall and a few paces from the spot where Becket was murdered in 1170 ; the four knights battering at the door were again repeating history within a short distance ; and when Becket's body at the end was carried out by his priests through the audience, they issued into the cloister where monks had passed with the burden of their martyr archbishop. Such associations were quietly taken for granted by Martin Browne as director, and by Robert Speaight, who played Becket as a good actor (he had been one of the Old Vic Hamlets) both intellectually and spiritually attuned to Eliot's mind. The chorus of Women of Canterbury defined the nature of the play from the beginning, for they were neither realistically " the poor " whom they declared themselves to be, nor archaically the chorus of Greek drama exciting the spectator to pity and terror by their commentary on the action. They were a group of young women trained by Elsie Fogerty in choral speaking and employed by the director so that the dramatist should speak directly to his

listener. No practising playwright could forbear to admire Eliot's swift and sure treatment of the four tempters of Becket and the four knights, or the economy with which the poet everywhere said in three lines what would occupy a prose dramatist for a whole scene. I felt that this was, as *The Times* afterwards declared it to be, "the one great play by a contemporary dramatist to be seen in England".

After summer months in Austria and Italy, I drove down one autumn Sunday morning with Martin Browne to Canterbury to fetch the costumes and scenery of *Murder in the Cathedral*, all of which fitted comfortably into the back of our car. This was part of the economy of our own production costs, which were not to be more than fifty pounds and in fact were much less. The play was presented at the Mercury in November and began a run of 225 nights. For many weeks and even months it was hard to get a seat. The audiences were oddly and almost equally divided between churchpeople and the Chelsea-Bloomsbury public; and at the theatre bar one saw priests in cassocks and rationalists in tweeds, each with a glass of wine in hand, discussing Eliot's work. All this was just as unexpected as my former success as dramatist, and for that reason was as happy. There was the further prospect of working for a long time with a group of people toward a definite end, in a theatre whose receipts were large enough to meet all present needs and even to build up a small reserve for the future. The company were in complete accord with Martin Browne and myself, and the run was sustained by their integrity as much as anything. On many nights I was able to see the play myself, standing at the back among many standing strangers;

and that alone made it worth while to own a poet's theatre and keep it open.

At some time in the near future we had hoped to transfer *Murder in the Cathedral* to America with the English company, playing it from coast to coast without too much consideration of Broadway; but this plan miscarried because a New York production by WPA (Federal Theatre Project) had been authorized just before our success in London with the play. I made an American visit early in 1936 without being able to influence this decision. The WPA production was already well advanced, it could not be stopped except by a legal pressure we were unwilling to use against such an enterprise, and it eventually succeeded on its own merits. In New York I was able to see *Winterset*, which proved how international the movement toward poetic drama, in English at any rate, was becoming. Eliot's play meantime continued in London throughout the mourning for King George and into the following summer. The run at the Mercury was resumed in September, and soon afterwards J. P. Mitchelhill, genuinely moved by the play as he saw it, offered to transfer the production to his Duchess Theatre in the West End. There it ran four months longer, surviving even the time of the Abdication when certain passages about the Archbishop and the throne gained an embarrassing topicality that even the author had not foreseen. It was, I think, the only contemporary play to close its run at capacity. The idea that it would ever cease running seemed to be new to the public, and the theatre was besieged for the final week. The next phase was a tour of the English and Scottish cities, during which large and small theatres

alike were crowded. This was concluded by a season at the Old Vic, where the play should eventually become one of the classics of the repertory. The last time I met Lilian Baylis was on the closing night in July 1937, when we sat together in a box and looked from the stage to a house where no seat was vacant. And that is the theatre history of *Murder in the Cathedral* in Britain, though there was a further tour in the autumn of 1937 and a revival at the Mercury in 1940. Eliot's deep originality of conception was bound to influence new writers for the stage, and before the beginning of the War this influence had already extended into Europe. The free countries were making ready to perform the play when the blow fell. In Middle Europe the ban had fallen automatically upon its production.

The next Mercury play by a poet was Archibald Macleish's *Panic*, a dramatic reconstruction in verse of the financial crash of 1933. Coming from New York, where it had been given a few months earlier, this was almost an inevitable choice; for the Mercury wanted at the same time to stress the unity of English and American dramatic poetry and to present a play of modern life whose rhythm of verse speech should be effective in the theatre. Eliot was already at work on his own modern play in verse, which took shape in *The Family Reunion*. The challenge to existing theatre values had to be made. I think our production of *Panic* was a good one; but the play failed because it was unequal and brief, the main woman character in it did not matter essentially to the action, and the crowd characters mattered so much that one was always expecting them to take a decisive part in the drama. Many spirited passages

in trochaic verses (which are iambics with the stress on the first syllable of each foot instead of the second) supported Macleish's contention that this form echoes modern speech ; but they never carried the listener away as dramatic poetry should carry him. We had done a good experimental play and that was all.

Humbert Wolfe's *Reverie of Policeman* was just as indecisive because its author was a confirmed and even incurable romantic who mixed lyric sentiment and rhyming wit in a way distasteful to the moderns among his listeners, while the more old-fashioned, with whom he might have succeeded, were not yet ready to accept a London policeman and the Bust of Darwin as speaking characters in a verse-play, even a bitter comedy in verse. The piece was worth doing at the Mercury for just these reasons, both educative and exasperating : the possibilities of the romantic school had to be examined, and Wolfe had in him the makings of a dramatist. He certainly invented something new when, instead of calling the failure of his play " a flop ", he wrote to me regretting " the tragic abstention of the public ". This was truly the grand romantic manner.

Success returned to the Mercury with *The Ascent of F.6*, by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, which came to our stage by the collaboration of the Group Theatre and its director Rupert Doone. At that time we were still trying to find means by which a poet's play could run for more than a short sequence of performances ; and here was one that ran its hundred nights. Since then the world has moved so fast that the style of this verse-and-prose tragedy of a Himalayan expedition seems outmoded already. But there



is a long run of centuries for the main theme of *F.6* (as everybody called it), which is essentially the same as that of *Hamlet* : the problem of a man of thought or inward action contemplating the outward meaningless action of the world : of a man of integrity made the plaything of calculation and interest : of a man of sensibility facing every tough issue with an irony or a smile. Radio speakers and a listening suburban pair made a double chorus to the tragedy, so that the authors were able to indulge their satire and their expressionism at the same time. From this rather uncertain background the group of Himalayan climbers stood out as remarkable dramatic portraits, though they mostly resembled boys one had met at school and never expected to meet again. The Demon reputed to inhabit the top of the mountain charted *F.6* on the map, and the hero's mother who haunted him in other and psycho-analytical ways, were uncompleted decorations of the tale. But the writers of verse-plays, long after the present convulsion of the world, will be able to look back on *F.6* as a forerunner of their achievement.

And here I can add a few reasons for the success and failure of the poets in the theatre during these years. The verse-form is so magnificent a medium for the stage, so rich in opportunity for the actor and director as well as the dramatist, that there is no need to justify its use ; and the choice of a subject from modern life only heightens the dramatic surprise of poetic treatment. But there is every need for the writer using so new a form to study the theatre and to know what he is doing when he puts words on paper. Very likely the proscenium playhouse with its curtain and

its peep-show pictorial effect is not the playhouse of which he is thinking as he sits in his study ; he may want something like the Elizabethan theatre with its apron stage, or he may reach out in imagination to a rebuilding of the arena of the Greeks in modern architecture. Failing these — and architectural revolutions are not made overnight — he may turn his thoughts to the screen, where he will find many directors who understand his problem and some who even look hopefully forward to the use of verse in pictures. My own aim would be to win the poet for the stage and to keep him working there ; for the stage can give his imagination the fullest play and his words the deepest understanding. How, then, can we bring the poet into contact with a group of artists who will realize his characters and at the same time quicken his creative faculty as it is always quickened by the actual and the practical ?

We were luckily able to cast *Murder in the Cathedral* from existing stage talent, apart from the chorus who had to be drawn from a trained reserve of verse-speakers in the nature of a choir. But this was the exception, and poets who write for the stage must accept the rule. The rule is that the producing manager and director sit down together a month before the date of presentation to find out who is available, and to make one compromise after another in the name of necessity. Our own *Ascent of F.6* (1937) and the Westminster production of Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1938) had to be cast from a momentarily free group of present and future screen stars, Old Vic and other character actors, and minor players who had served the new theatre movement faithfully enough to be rewarded with a part. Such casting

brings disillusionment to dramatists, who know too little at best about the workshop of the stage. They can learn more by giving time and pains to rehearsal, including the rehearsal of plays other than their own. The main problem of casting remains, and it is to be solved only by the group production of poets' plays in a repertory large enough to give every talent a chance. It is time enough to think of a West End or Broadway production for a poet's play when it has taken shape in the little professional theatre and won its own specialized audience.

With all this in mind, I had meant to go on producing plays by poets at the Mercury and to build up a repertory which could be cast from a small regular company. *Murder in the Cathedral* had been done very successfully in the first instance with a curtained background and a few scenic structures and properties that one stage worker could handle; and all other plays were to be given with the same simplicity. But even so, our resources were too limited for the frequent changes of bill that repertory production requires, and our seats were so few that the company could only earn a decent living when the theatre was full each night. We had unwillingly to admit the need of producing plays for a run — which meant considering whether they would be likely to run or not. It was about this time that the New York unit controlled by Orson Welles and John Houseman paid us the compliment of borrowing our name; and with much the same ideas as our own, they had on a larger scale much the same history of production and occasional outstanding success. For several seasons Mercury productions were those that mattered on Broadway and round about. They were

sometimes made without scenery, like the famous *Julius Caesar* in modern dress ; and we heard about them and envied our namesakes their stage if not their ramshackle playhouse, the old Comedy in New York.

The Mercury in London needed to be two or three times larger. It did well to be out of the hectic West End marketplace, but a modern building was becoming essential. Ballet, as well as the poetic drama, was beginning to outgrow the style imposed by too intimate presentation. I had long felt that stage dancing, which evolved from the Court ballroom entertainment, had come to be presented as a picture in the proscenium frame not so much by its own will as by the convention of the theatre of opera and comedy. Left to itself, it might far more reasonably have chosen the arena of the Greek drama or the modern circus. Rightly or wrongly, I saw ballet emerging with enhanced effect from the proscenium and coming out upon a platform to compose a truly three-dimensional picture ; and many lovers of dancing supported me in this view. As for the poet's play, it had never properly belonged to the proscenium theatre at all, and the apron of the Elizabethan playhouse had been the very heart of its action. So it was rather more than the indulgence of a daydream that led me to draw plans of the desired playhouse for both of them, a building unlike any in London or indeed in Western Europe, though bearing some modest resemblance to the theatre that Gropius had in mind. The main principle was the union of proscenium stage with arena. A single tier of seating rose fanwise in Greek fashion above and around the large apron of the forestage, beneath which was space for a full orchestra if it

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

should be needed. On either side of the proscenium, which could be used either with or without a curtain — and Martin Browne and I were against any curtain for our kind of drama — were doorways which formed possible entries or exits for the players. Above the proscenium and forestage was a canopy, within which a great part of the lighting was disposed. The stage was to stretch from wall to wall and have a width at least twice that of the proscenium arch. The total superficial area was to be that of a West End theatre seating, say, 1000 people, but the actual capacity was to be not more than 500, possibly less. The economic difference was to be made up by a large excavated space below the stage and auditorium, affording studios for schools of dance and drama. We were to provide also for the playgoer's food and wine. A possible use of the building for Mozartian opera, as well as for concert music, had been considered in the plan. The estimate was for a building cost of twenty-five thousand pounds, or, say, a hundred thousand dollars. It could have been done for that, and well done.

As luck would have it, the very site came into the market in the summer of 1936, when Eliot's play had established itself successfully throughout a season. It consisted of a derelict row of shops with a street of former cottages and stables, the whole forming a square of about 100 feet each side, and lying within a few steps of the Mercury in the same street, close to the main traffic crossing of Western London. An existing byway practicable for transport led to what could be the stage door. The owner could pull down everything and put up what he pleased.

I ought of course to have run about London to look for

somebody to buy this property for me, and then to have persuaded him or her to build the theatre afterwards. That is how most theatres have got themselves built. But my experience in this world of drama is individual, and the theatre I wanted to build was individual too. With the friendly aid of my bank, I walked in and bought the site myself for a modest sum. The demolition soon began, numerous rats came to a sudden end, and a big open space appeared where the stables and cottages had been. In the following winter, which was the last chance had we known it, I very nearly (but not quite) succeeded in forming the group of well-wishers prepared to build the new Mercury, for which the older building near by was to be the experimental producing stage. The difficulties in which this enterprise afterwards landed me have nothing to do with a chapter on poetic drama. But the plot of ground remains ; and when I look at it to-day, encumbered by three varied types of air-raid shelter and one row of ancient buildings still mistakenly spared by the bombardment, I see the general outline of the stage and auditorium as they were planned and may eventually be built, even if I do not build them myself. This ruinous and weed-grown patch of London soil is the visible monument (I will not say graveyard) of hopes aroused by dramatic poets in the late 1930's.

## EUROPEAN FAREWELLS

During these years which were chiefly given to the staging of poetic drama, my contacts with the West End remained as before. I went to most of the new plays, knew most of the actors and directors, and sometimes agreed to write or adapt a play which might eventually be produced. I felt no urge to submit any work of my own, for in practice the days of the free-lance dramatist were past. Our London theatre had as presentable a list as any in Europe, and the young American dramatists had put our own writers on their mettle ; but the organization of the stage had changed since the time when Galsworthy and Maugham had been the ruling playwrights. There had been the period of Noel Coward ; and now the best work was being written by men like J. B. Priestley or Emlyn Williams, who as producing managers or actor-producers could always choose their own opportunity. Their kind of theatre was not the one I cared for most, but they brought into our drama of the immediate pre-war years a searching and sincere quality that had been absent from the work of the generation just before them.

Even though late in the day, with calamity overhanging all our minds, these newest writers were seeking the form of the morality play rather than the plain realistic drama or domestic comedy. In theatre direction they showed understanding too. It was the Westminster Theatre under Priestley's control that stood out especially as a producing stage from 1936 onward. For the more fashionable kind of West End theatre, *Theatre Royal* or *Tovarich* made not unworthy successors to *Grand Hotel*.

In the summer of 1935 I came once again into this life of the West End with a play that for a while was very successful. *The Mask of Virtue* was a free English rendering of Sternheim's *Die Marquise von Arcis*, which in turn was a dramatic version of a tale by Diderot. Sydney Carroll, who presented this comedy, thought at first of calling it *Virtuous Visor* ("And with a virtuous visor hide deep vice"), which I would have preferred. The plot was entirely in the spirit of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, cynical and free-spoken; but what had interested the German dramatist and now interested me was the task of bringing out the eighteenth-century blend, or adulteration, of scandalous intrigue with high-flown sentiment. The only thing to do was to make the sentiment a comedy in itself, so that any character who pretended to feel it sincerely should be the more preposterous the more he felt himself to be sincere; and this was entertainment for a sophisticated audience, balancing always on a fine razor-edge of irony and masquerade. It was the very stuff for experienced comedians like Jeanne de Casalis and Frank Cellier, and they made the most of it; but the play was completely stolen by Vivien Leigh, a young actress



whom nobody had seen before. In the part of a girl, far from innocent, whose marriage to a vain philosophizing Marquis consummates the revenge of his former mistress, she managed by her own wit to remain within the frame of the comedy and to present some sort of formal picture of beauty, inward innocence and demure sophistication in place of the ordinary romantic reality of the *ingénue*. This was quite a feat in a girl who was then (if I may say it now) about as immature as any young actress could be. Next morning Sternheim and I watched the line of people at the theatre box-office with satisfaction, and then went off to drink together with a mock-disgust worthy of the comedy. Here we were, two good Europeans in our fifties who knew our playwriting job and had done it well enough ; there were Casalis and Cellier quite admirably realizing our intention ; and now came a slip of an actress with a virginal mask to run away with the critics, the public and all. Having watched her at rehearsal, we knew what she had done and what she hadn't, much better than the dazzled reviewers and the gossip-writers who babbled of her sudden leap into fame for days and weeks. " First entry of a film star " was one of Sternheim's sarcasms as he went off to Brussels ; I have not seen or heard of him since.

Because of the rehearsals of this comedy I had cancelled an engagement, long since agreed with the Spanish Embassy in London, to attend the celebration of Lope de Vega's tercentenary in Seville. Even the project of doing a play by Lope at the Mercury had fallen through. It was little compensation, that summer, to see the *Faust* in Salzburg which had been washed out by weather on its production

two years before. It now looked ingenious and rather empty. The end of the great Reinhardt theatre period had come, and it was hastened by the growing cleavage between Germany and Austria and the consequent unreality of all theatrical proceedings in Salzburg. Music became in effect the sole interest of the Festival, which lasted a season or two more. I was myself occupied with a play which Henri Lenormand had called *Crépuscule du Théâtre*, leaving the spectator to guess whether the twilight was that of sunset or dawn. Although not a poetic drama it was a play about poetry in the theatre and the fate that can overtake it at the hands of commercial production and even "creative direction". It appealed to me as the subject for a Mercury comedy, and Lenormand was good enough to let me remould it in this sense. Eventually I produced it under the title *In Theatre Street*, and the French author came over to give it his approval. This summer was a time when I could write at leisure in the Austrian Alps and at Trieste and Fiume, before driving by Bergamo and Turin over the Mont-Cenis to Chambéry and then by Bourg and the Church of Brou, through the vineyards of Burgundy, to Fontainebleau and Paris. But in Italy there had been decided mutterings, with experimental black-outs in ports and inland cities; and in London it was said that our ships and theirs were watching each other in the Mediterranean. Lenormand and I had agreed that his twilight was not of the stage alone.

In the autumn of 1935, about the time of our opening of the theatre for poets at the Mercury, came a London invasion of German and Austrian artists who were hoping to follow in the train of the successful Elisabeth Bergner. But the

playgoing public of London is much less cosmopolitan than the city as a whole — it is in fact rather conservatively English — and the Continental style of acting with its full register of expression, vocal and emotional, was not easily to be harmonized with our own. A few men like Oskar Homolka, an old member of Reinhardt's company, mastered the inflexions of our language pretty well. Various leading ladies from Berlin and Vienna were unable to understand why they had failed to make themselves equally understood. But the main trouble, both for these artists and the producing managers and directors who accompanied them as refugees, was the poverty of the plays and parts they were able to offer. They could only have succeeded if they had brought great drama with them and had shown themselves indifferent to ordinary success. Our playgoers crowded instead to the Old Vic to see young William Devlin in *Peer Gynt*, to the New Theatre to a *Romeo and Juliet* in which John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier exchanged the parts of Mercutio and Romeo, or to the adventurous private stages of the Gate and the Group. For the last of these Auden and Isherwood had written *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, a political-musical comedy with some poetry. As important as any of this drama of the time was H. G. Wells's screen picture *Things to Come*, casting its long significant shadow. Some of us also saw a portent in the first (and almost certainly the last) London International Surrealist Exhibition, where the real and the bogus in painting were fashionably mixed. Near the end of the season came *The Seagull* directed by Komisarjevsky; and Chekhov, who had once been the dramatist of the few, now drew the town.

We had done a good season's work in my little theatre ; and in that July of 1936, having acquired the site for a new Mercury, I set out by car with two English friends as passengers to drive across Belgium and Germany to the mountains of the Salzkammergut. The Rhineland looked much as usual as we followed the river for fifty miles, but there was a choric mass-drama of some political significance in Heidelberg, which was decorated so thickly with swastika flags that the old jutting house-fronts were nearly hidden. We inspected photographs of an immense concrete arena and a stage with hundreds of performers, and read the accounts of the affair which were distributed in every language to the tourist, and slept and passed on. It was more definitely displeasing to see the west front of the cathedral of Ulm, a building always open to reproach as *kolossal* but none the less magnificent, nearly obliterated by more flaggery. In Munich, not far beyond the Rathaus, a new motor road branched away across the plain toward the jagged line of mountains which had seemed so far-off in student days and now towered visibly with every minute's progress. I remember the last German village of Mittenwald, crammed with summer visitors who were still pent-up within their own frontier and eyed the British car enviously : there was sudden stillness and solitude as we passed the customs post and entered Austria. By nightfall we gained the valley which by now had become my summer home ; and a day or two later I saw my guests off the premises in the manner of a host, escorting them nearly to the top of the high pass, much encumbered that year by snow and ice, from which they could look down on their own goal of Carinthia.

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

After my round of mountains and music came the real southward journey by the pass from Salzburg into Italy ; to Padua, Ferrara and Ravenna ; to Verona where Verdi's *Otello* was sung in the Areni by star-and-searchlight to twenty thousand listeners including ice-cream sellers ; to Mantua among the mosquito-ridden marshes ; and back by the Trentino and Merano to the Brenner, Innsbruck and Kitzbühel, from which place I had to make an excursion to Schloss Mittersill to discuss a play with Gilbert Miller. Here was one of the phenomena of those years in which Austria was an international playground. A medieval castle with a courtyard and rounded corner-turrets had been modernized by two counts, furnished with works of art from all over Europe, and opened as a club hotel with the rights of shooting, fishing, flying or what-not around the countryside. I drove there to breakfast on the terrace with Miller, who was trying to telephone Paris or New York, a way of his which caused much agitation in the village post-office. International ladies, most of them ravishing in *Dirndl* dresses with the Schiaparelli cut, were peeping from the casements as they finished their morning make-up. In the courtyard an international gentleman in feathered cap, Tyrolean jacket and *Lederhosen*, a gun slung negligently from his shoulder, was being photographed standing with one foot on a chamois which had just become his prey. And in 1936, maybe, nobody doubted that Austria and this life would last as long as the castle's foundations in the living rock, on a height which was a natural viewpoint for eternal Alps.

But two people entering Germany again by Kufstein,

traversing the crowded mountain villages, dining in the Ratskeller of sullen Munich and going on by the Three Moors of Augsburg to the ill-named Freudenstadt in the Black Forest, to reach the Rhine at the bridge of Kehl, could see things quite otherwise. Nothing stood firm but the rock itself, all was crumbling, much was already dust. That was a time when one could breathe the more freely for being on the soil of France, standing in the shadow of Strasbourg Cathedral, or seeing the storks in the fields of Alsace, or sleeping in Nancy to look out in the morning on the gilt wrought-iron gates and railings of the Place Stanislas. From Bar-le-Duc to Rheims the switchback Roman road, one of the noblest surely in Europe, ran steadfast through history ; and wayfarers turning aside from it in the heat of a late summer afternoon to rest on a bank among the thickets needed no words to feel how old it was in time and action, older than the cathedral of Rheims or the stone oxen that the masons had carried up the steps to the height of Laon, a little further on the inevitable westward way. At the end, after Soissons and Compiègne, lay the very heart of freedom among the forests, rivers and poplars of Ile-de-France.

If now the summer and winter seasons of this tale seem to succeed each other with a swiftness of day and night, it is because my own work in the London of these years has already been outlined. Eliot's play was running again in the autumn of 1936 and more plays by poets were to follow. The Mercury was the smallest of the independent professional stages standing apart from the West End. But theirs was the living spirit of our theatre, even though the older stage with much publicity could exhibit work like *The Boy*

*David* by Barrie, played by Bergner, directed by Komisarjevsky and rejected by the public within a month. The Old Vic at its reopening could find nothing better on which to flourish than the bawdy wit of *The Country Wife*, but in mid-season it made amends with a full-length *Hamlet* directed by Tyrone Guthrie with Laurence Olivier as the Prince. Half a dozen producers led by Cochran were preparing for the coming year with their "Coronation revue"; but the parade of theatre at the time of the ceremony remained puny and colourless. The exceptional play was *Victoria Regina*, written by Laurence Housman for the little theatre stage, first produced at the Gate, and carried later into Shaftesbury Avenue on a wave of sentiment assisted by Edward's monarchical gesture in releasing it from the Censor's ban. The summer brought a bus strike which shortened the run of most plays, our own *F.6* and *In Theatre Street* among them. When our third company with *Murder in the Cathedral* dispersed after their season at the Vic, not to reunite until just before their visit to America, I was myself ready for Europe again. One needed no special premonition to know that any journey now undertaken might be the last in a decade or a lifetime.

From the Atlantic seaboard to the Tyrol is no great number of hundreds of miles, less perhaps than are covered in a two-day span of desert or prairie by an American driving from coast to coast in his own country. But when the way lies by the heaths and orchards of Normandy and cornfields of Maine, the vineyards of Orléanais and Nivernais and Côte d'Or, the winding rivers of Franche-Comté and the hills and plains of Alsace, leading through Swiss valleys to the

Alps of Liechtenstein and Vorarlberg, the panorama unfolded is the richest in Western Europe. Parts of this way I knew already, mostly those to the eastward traversing lakeside, pass and forest ; but in that July of 1937 all the road lay stretched in one significant and final picture. Final, because not death but life could make such passage through the heart of old Roman and Gaulish Europe impossible again ; and the life that held such power might itself be death in life, as it has proved to be. Such thoughts brought with them the long silences in which this journey largely passed, with eyes calmly and gravely scanning the tree-grown line of the road, the shape of a belfry or the contour of a hill, the movement of an ox-cart or the animation of a city, as eyes look on things familiar that are about to vanish into memory.

Nor was it any great distance from our Austrian valley over the Grossglockner road into Italy as in former years. It may be possible to rise in the Salzkammergut at dawn and sup in Padua ; but it is better to sleep one night at least in the shadow of the Dolomites, which are decorative towers more than mountains, and then to descend leisurely into the Venetian plain through the smaller towns and cities with their inland waterways making the effect of Venice in miniature. From Padua, this year, the way was through Rovigo to Bologna, and thence over the chain of hills between the Emilia and Tuscany, as far as Fiesole and Florence. This latter road ran for sixty miles from hilltop to hilltop through villages clustered about each summit, looking down into blue valleys ; and here on the cool heights in late afternoon were walking gay and grave Floren-



tines on summer vacation with their children, amid the vines clambering on ancient walls. Certainly there was no need of any words at dusk that evening : there is no approach to any place like this approach to Florence from the hills, and I was to see the city for the first time. It must have been about Fiesole, near the Roman theatre, that a funeral procession with horses in black plumes drawing the hearse and the mourners, and lighted by lanterns hanging from shafts and carriage-roofs, came up the hill to the traditional burial in a high place after dark. This may have broken the spell of silence, I do not remember ; but in a few moments I was driving along the Arno bank and over the Ponte Vecchio itself, ignorant that such traffic is forbidden and the policeman preventing it goes off duty after dark.

The true theatre of Florence is the Piazza della Signoria, and one need imagine no other, least of all in the hot-weather season. Here in front of the Old Palace were all the assemblies and popular tumults and festivals and most of the executions of the city ; and together they comprise a drama beyond that of any covered playhouse. But this is no place to write of Florence, though it may be noted how Pistoia and Prato are brought by the road facilities of our time into the Florentine orbit and even on to the actual Florentine stage, where they properly belong because of their place in the Republic. They are now suburbs, as they should be, of this great capital of art ; and they bring their churches and Della Robbia friezes into the complete dramatic picture. More distant is Siena ; and in mid-August, on the Monday after the Feast of the Assumption, is the Palio.

Siena is reached from Florence by road in two or three hours, if you do not break your neck on the way by trying to ascend one of the hilltops crowned by fortresses, monasteries or just Tuscan villages, which rise temptingly on every hand. The city itself is high-lying, windy and cool: Baedeker will require from you at least a week in which to inspect its churches and monuments. On the day of the great horse-race it is besieged by people streaming on foot across the countryside, jogging in carts along every byway, riding in coaches or cars or trains. The narrow main street and the flights of steps that serve as side streets are so congested that it is hardly possible to walk: this anticipates the final crowding of a mass of humanity into the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele in early afternoon to see the race.

This Tuscan city is divided into seventeen wards, which have been rivals through centuries. Hence the Palio delle Contrade ("Banner of the Wards"), a horse-race which puts the winning ward at the head of affairs for a year. This seems as good a means of civic election as any other: certainly it has the fullest support of the citizens. The course is three times round the vast main square, on a cobbled roadway covered with sand for the occasion; and the mass of the Sienese, reinforced by country folk from all over Tuscany, crowd themselves into the middle of the square behind wooden barriers, while privileged or paying spectators look on from windows, balconies and platforms. Each horse and jockey represents a ward, but only ten compete each time, seven being chosen by turn and three by drawing lots. A larger number would increase the many dangers of the race, which is ridden bareback with the jockeys flourishing their

whips and using them also as weapons. A horse running wide at a bend can throw his rider against a porch or into the spectators. The race is started by firing a mortar behind the runners, who then bolt rather than gallop round the course. While they are running the great bell of the city hall, which is visibly swinging out and ringing above the heads of the crowd, is as good as silenced by the shouting ; otherwise it can be heard for ten miles. Generally not more than three or four runners succeed in finishing. Each has previously been sprinkled with holy water from the chapel of its ward, and the whole festival is linked with the Virgin, who is patroness of the city : her figure is painted on the banner which is the prize.

Before the race comes a full afternoon's parade of companies from the wards, wearing their liveries and seated on decorated carts drawn by white bulls or oxen. In front of them go heralds of fantastic skill, who toss their banners high into the air so that they unfurl above and furl themselves again as they are caught. This strutting and splendid pageantry checks the procession here and there, and leads to individual rivalries of throwing and catching amid a frenzy. After their circuit of the square the companies take position on tiers of platforms, with banners now waving slowly and continuously, to await the decision of the race. It was not surprising to find Marinetti in Siena that day, declaring that he would never miss a Palio and had flown from Rome to see it. One thing he said which I find to be true : the spectacle is medieval in aspect, living in spirit. Even should religion fail the Sieneese, it would survive as pagan drama.

And so back to the warmth of a Florentine midnight and

## EUROPEAN FAREWELLS

---

the stillness of the Lungarno. Summer theatre was ended for the present and perhaps for good. The farewell to Florence was echoed at Pisa and Genoa, at Avignon and the Pont du Gard and Vaucluse, and even at Marseilles : if they are ever seen again they will be strangely different. Driving northward at last to home and winter theatre, I paused only for a solitary glimpse of the Roman stage at Orange by sunset ; then rising at dawn reached Paris in one day and Calais by noon the next. An innkeeper at Moulins said the devil must be behind me ; and in the light of these years I think he was right.

## 19

### NEW ENGLAND VENTURE

**D**uring the summer of 1937 the National Theatre Committee of which I was a member had bought a London site. This step I had supported from a feeling that a part of the large sum we had in hand, subscribed over many years, should be so invested, leaving the remainder in securities until the full amount for the erection of the theatre should be available. At the time this seemed to be a common-sense proceeding, and I see no reason to think we were wrong ; although it is now unlikely that the National Theatre of Great Britain will be built on the Kensington site that we acquired. In 1941 an increasing part of London consists of sites, and we shall find a larger and better space on which to build our memorial to Shakespeare and home of dramatic art. But in 1937 the gesture of the Trustees' purchase aroused hot controversy. Everybody wrote to his or her newspaper (which Taine once declared to be the English form of confessional) to say what they thought about the National Theatre project in general. The dramatic critic of *The Times* wrote to say in effect that such a theatre was now

unnecessary : the Old Vic and West End between them could make all the large-scale productions that anybody wished to see, and newer dramatists could get their work performed on experimental stages like those of the Gate and the Mercury. A National Theatre (he argued) could only exist by producing classics or by giving the stamp of academic recognition to modern work when the virtue of originality had gone out of it. If I may answer him here, this is the strongest case against anything national, whether a theatre or opera or art gallery, and it deserves to be stated. I should never expect the National Theatre to lead the way in any respect but its general standard of production ; but such a standard is worth establishing and never was more desirable than now. Less subtle opponents of the scheme merely wanted the funds as an endowment for the Vic or Sadler's Wells, a purpose debarred by the Trust. Plenty of die-hard resistance appeared in the ranks of the theatre profession as the fear spread that something would at last be done. How far away, now, is the time of such prejudices and blind oppositions ! Some form of National Theatre emerges as a national need : the private theatre can no longer cope with its larger tasks. The question is only how, and not why, it shall come into being ; and that may well be determined by a Ministry of Arts.

Meantime John Gielgud, representing the best on our traditional stage, had opened with *Richard II* his season's repertory, which was to include *The School for Scandal*, *The Three Sisters* and the *Merchant of Venice*. This would have sufficed a National Theatre for a week of good performances, and the Chekhov production made by Michel Saint-

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

Denis was in fact worthy of any stage in the world. The same season was to bring us from America O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Sherwood's *Idiot's Delight*, and from Prague Copek's *Power and Glory*, beside *Time and the Conways* and *Robert's Wife* from our own dramatists ; so that there was no lack of drama in this last year before world-politics began inevitably to dominate the scene.

At the Mercury, my way was now defined by force of circumstances. The sole means of getting a theatre built on my own new site was to follow up the success of *Murder in the Cathedral*, which thus far had never failed us and in fact had everywhere exceeded expectations. We now looked hopefully to America, though not particularly to New York, where the success of the WPA had made that of another presentation doubtful. Owing to Harvard associations, Boston could be regarded as Eliot's home town, though he had been born further west in Saint Louis. An English company bringing the work of an American-born poet to New England would be pursuing a bold imaginative trail. Our plan therefore was to open at Boston early in 1938, to make an extended tour of Philadelphia and Washington and all the cities we could bring within our orbit, and perhaps to venture a limited season in New York before sailing homeward for the summer ; then having made contacts with producing groups like-minded to ourselves, to send out other companies, both English and American, from coast to coast. And if one single tour, however successful, could not quite build us our new theatre for English and American poets, perseverance could achieve everything.

How nearly our plan succeeded and how far it mis-

carried will be worth recording here : it is one of those failure stories that all can understand. Our fate was decided on a single snowy day in Massachusetts ; but this is rather looking forward, for the first problem of the Mercury was to decide the scope and framework of the tour. As a director, I believe in the little theatre, and would always seek out the dramatic audience that lies beyond Shaftesbury Avenue or Broadway. As a playwright, I am used to big theatres and their producing managers who think of thousands of dollars weekly where I think of hundreds. With our successful play by a poet, should we tour America on little theatre lines, going from town to town before sponsored audiences in colleges and institutes, or should we boldly enter the round of big cities that Broadway uses for its try-outs and road successes ? The first of these plans we should have to improvise entirely for ourselves, at every disadvantage in distance and organization ; but for the second we had already the willing offer of co-operation from Gilbert Miller, whose New York offices could book the tour and give us all their organizing service. Our company would have accepted either way, but as theatre folk they had their own ambitions. As I was to take the major risk, I made the decision : we would join Miller and undertake the big-city tour. While the company were still playing in English towns before sailing, I slipped away on the *Ile-de-France* to New York. During a few days there, the weather became news, as usual in January when zero has once been reached ; and as I stepped from the overnight train to Boston it was " plenty below ", as a coloured porter told me. The news-lines put it at twenty below, which is cold enough.



None but a Londoner perhaps can relish the city of Boston to the full ; and then only when he had lived in other cities of Europe and measured their history. Not that the place is beautiful at a first glance. The water-front section is as grim as that of any port can be, some of the main streets look like the dullest of Manchester, and a good part of Back Bay consists of avenues of smug residences in the manner of Kensington. One can understand why some Americans say glibly that Boston is dead and doesn't know it. But the slope of the Common has the sweep and surge of no other green space that I have seen in a city ; and the colonial spires and frontages, the Old State House and the gilt-domed capitol of Massachusetts, match the vista of the near-by Cambridge with Harvard stretching along the shores of the Charles River. The skaters in the Gardens move in what might well be the luminous winter-piece of a Dutch master : the shop-fronts of the Italian quarter exhibit delectable and multitudinous wedding-cakes with sugar effigies of bride and bridegroom : the clubs around the old town are full of shrewd, hardy, kindly gentlemen of fifty upward who, but for their welcome to the stranger, are more like clubmen than any actor could make them : on Beacon Hill prim housemaids in caps come out to polish the brass door-knockers of lace-curtained houses which, when one visits them for dinner, prove to contain great spoils of travel in the tapestries and paintings of Europe : down in dockland Irish voices hurl mighty Irish oaths which are hushed as his reverence goes by : among the inner suburbs a temple of Science rises, imposing and somewhat frigid, to enshrine the memory of Mary Eddy : down crooked Washington

Street flows the stream of a modern humanity like any other in America or the world.

I had days in which to view all this, before the Cunarder on which my company had sailed direct from Liverpool was due to berth. Meantime the frost had turned to thaw and flood, a horizontal rain blew in from the Atlantic, and the ship which had been signalled for dawn drew alongside at sunset instead. We were all just in time to see the first performance of *Our Town* on any stage: it happened opposite the theatre in which we were to open a week later. Part of the night was well spent in talking with Thornton Wilder in a coffee-house. Next day one of our cast, Chris Casson, developed an appendix which had to come out: his mother Sybil Thorndike was luckily in New York with a play and could visit him. We opened with our own play quite moderately, for Boston was not going to take anything on trust; but the house reacted well and the reviews were good. Two or three indecisive evenings followed, with the receipts dropping and not much booking going on. It seemed that the play had definitely failed, by all reasonable standards; and how could we hold out for a second week in Boston followed by a fortnight in Philadelphia (an uncertain theatre town) and weeks in Washington and Pittsburgh? We were a company far from home, risking limited capital, in the hope of making money for a poet's theatre in London: not even our return fares were guaranteed. At this juncture Gilbert Miller telephoned from New York, sincerely concerned for our position. Without offering advice he asked me what were our prospects. I tried to be cheerful, but he was pessimistic after

considering the returns of several nights. It seemed that Boston might be a trap for theatre optimists ; and I was bound to think of *Our Town*, a fine sensitive work, which had played to empty houses for a week and closed with a loss of thousands. Perhaps New York was better for us ; for that city at least knew our play and had rallied to it once already. In a few hours the decision was taken : we would play our two weeks in Boston, cancel Philadelphia and Washington and the rest of the tour, and open in New York within a fortnight. The alternative for the company might well be sailing home again from Boston without seeing Broadway or Fifth Avenue at all.

It was snowing hard as I went back to the theatre in late afternoon, knowing the step now taken to be irrevocable. A few people seemed to be standing outside on the sidewalk, and others were casually joining them : it took me time to discover that this was the tail-end of a line extending into the lobby and across to the box-office. I asked the manager what all these people were doing, for there must have been fifty of them ; he said they were waiting to buy tickets for our play. For no reason a box-office line had suddenly formed around lunch-time, and it had been there ever since. More business had been done in three hours than in the previous week. Maybe it was the weather : no, it couldn't be the weather which was shocking. Then they might have been reading the reviews ; or maybe those Harvard boys who had enquired about the play were through with their examinations. Such mysteries always envelop theatre bookings : we were happily surprised when the receipts jumped by a thousand dollars that night, and the first week

ended with full houses. The second week began in the same way ; and nobody but myself had any misgivings about the turn events had taken. The company argued that if they were doing so well in Boston, they would do well in any big city. The tour might have been successful, but there was time enough for that : now and not the summer was the right season for Broadway. Such is the effect on the actor of a full house : he feels (reasonably) that everybody wants to see him everywhere. I left for New York to await the company, and there learned that Philadelphia had shown an eager interest in our visit and a good part of the Diplomatic Corps was to have attended our first night in Washington. All this was too late.

We opened in New York before a dull house and had mixed notices. Here *Murder in the Cathedral* was no longer news, but an echo of something that had been urgent and thrilling news. The houses fell gently away for several weeks, assisted by a political depression spreading from Europe (for this was the spring of the Eden resignation, the early stage of appeasement and the invasion of Austria). It was not so good to be an Englishman in America at that time. We began piling up debts, and then the play came off, although the audiences filled up at the end. A tour was now impossible, for nobody wanted a Broadway failure. We made the usual efforts to raise fresh capital and carry on : to get ourselves transported to Canada : to arrange a university tour at short notice. Our scenery, with which we ought never to have encumbered ourselves — the Mercury in New York was playing to capacity with none at all — was carted away for destruction so that it should incur

neither import duties nor return freight charges. The Miller offices handsomely produced ocean fares, and by twos and threes we made our way disconsolately back to Europe. The Atlantic had never been so smooth or England so green as that spring. It was clear, looking back, that we had missed our mark of success by just three hours on that February day in Boston. Fate did not intend me to start building that new theatre for the poets ; which had it been begun, would probably by now have been knocked down again.

But the work of the Mercury was crippled for months, while we limited production to pay off debts on this side. I remember the rich enjoyment of seeing *The Three Sisters*, and about the same time a passing note on *Idiot's Delight* : " Let us hope it will not have to be recorded that several plays like this were to be seen a year or two before the Second Great War ". Odets's *Golden Boy* came along in the summer to confirm the hold of young American drama on the London playgoer. Shaw's *Geneva* was produced at Malvern, and so the dramatist in his eighties made the yearly gesture of proving himself right and all the world wrong. Gilbert Miller, back in London, had formed the plan of a dramatic version of *War and Peace*, which was to be written in German jointly by Alfred Neumann and Erwin Piscator and directed by Piscator himself with all the resources (though they were in fact simple) of stage mechanization. The use of platforms and stage boxes for characters making their commentary on the play, of moving backgrounds for the personages within it, and of puppet soldiers amid artificial mists on the field of Borodino, were among them. I

was to make the English version ; and so in July of 1938 I was met by Miller on the airfield of Zurich and driven out to Rapperswil on the lake where the writing of the play was going on. Everything in the script was perfectly feasible, and the main characters stood out from the action with a stark Tolstoyan reality : the main problems were those of a director rather than an author or translator, for the play at best could only be a "Journey through *War and Peace*", unless it were to be performed in a cycle lasting a week. Maybe this play will yet be performed ; but its prospects were already fading when I visited Piscator in Paris in early September. This was an excursion from the forest of Compiègne, where the Spahis riding to water their horses each morning made the sound of a thousand gentle waterfalls on the cobbles of the Place du Palais — a last happy recollection of France. No Austria that year, for Munich loomed instead.

The London autumn season opened with Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel* in Regent's Park and Charles Morgan's *The Flashing Stream* in the West End. The stage was hard-hit for a fortnight by the European crisis, but recovered briskly and for a while reflected the complacent view of Munich and the future. Writers were few and drama uncertain. The high-light of the season proved to be John Gielgud's revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which was to continue, well recast, into the season after.

The fortunes of the Mercury were soon restored by another revival, that of *The Playboy of the Western World* which I had long wanted to make. Maire O'Neill, who had created Pegeen Mike and played the part for twenty years,

became the Widow Quin ; and Cyril Cusack from the Abbey in Dublin brought a rich classic quality to Christy Mahon. With them were old members of the Irish Players company, Brefni O'Rorke and Harry Hutchinson. We were crowded for months, and this was another play to run forward into the first war season, when streets were darkened and theatres hard to find, but nights were quiet. At the Mercury and later at the Duchess *The Playboy* must have come before an entire new generation of listeners and spectators, and it was good to see how well it bore the character of an established masterpiece. Synge's world of imagination had never been actual, as actuality is understood by writers for the lifelike stage, including most playwrights who have written for the Abbey Theatre. Now that a generation had passed since the play's appearance in 1907, and the echoes of all mistaken controversy about it had died away, its other reality as work of art became plainer than ever. The death of Yeats, in the first month of our revival, recalled how much *The Playboy* had owed to him and how closely it was linked with all poetic drama.

And now there is little more to say about my journey through theatre, before thinking of to-morrow which is present to the mind of all who travel. The last original production of the Mercury, about Christmas of 1939, was the *Mandragola* of Machiavelli, licensed for English performance after 400 years. I had come across it in an odd way, through visiting a Kensington auction sale to buy wine and picking up instead a parchment-bound Italian copy of the *Works* in the first edition of 1550, where the two Florentine comedies are bound up with all the Machiavellian essays

and poems. About the same time a young Florentine director came to me from Rome, introduced by Silvio d'Amico, to study our English little theatre work before forming his own company in Italy. Together we went through the classical comedy scene by scene, and from our joint notes I began a paraphrase of it with some development of the women characters whom Machiavelli had treated in the Roman manner, leaving them closely walled in a tower of action around which the men run and make merry. All this was in the summer of 1939, when my Florentine friend had to leave overnight with a regretful handshake. The *Mandragola* that emerged was no antiquarian piece, but definitely a comedy of modern thought in costume; and as such I was able to offer it to a cast including John Laurie, who played the celebrated part of Nicia, and Sarah Churchill as his young wife Lucrezia. We scored fifty performances in the coldest midwinter England has known; and the Machiavellian comedy joins the line of plays we have created and hold for the future.

Meantime every past experience of failure or success comes into perspective as an event before the time of silent stages, vanished players, scattered onlookers and scars or rubble-heaps that mark the frontage of theatre to-day. These actually have put the full-stop to my tale, which has been concerned in the main with forms of creative effort possible only in a capital city. But a brave and considerable remnant of drama has now taken to the road, where it is played not in theatres only but in halls and barns, inns and workshops, churches and factories. Maybe now I shall join in that adventure too, for the gap between past and future



## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

---

is not to be bridged by clinging to any single hearth, even this beloved London which I leave unwillingly for a single night. Memory and association are things too precious in themselves, too significant a part of a man's life, to become habitual only. In a sense, the more one breaks with them the richer they grow.

## AFTERWARD AND FORWARD

Looking from my window on this late spring morning in 1941 I see how little has been changed, physically, in the months that have passed. They have been among the darkest known to mankind ; yet visibly within this limited view they have left no more trace than here a roofless house, there a row of blackened empty doorways or an array of sightless casements, and, more distant, a spire truncated to the form of obelisk. London's foliage, until now held back by the coldness of the season, bursts forth in a rich untarnished green. The outline of the city holds good, if the fabric it defines is something of a shell. A haze of old smoke and new hangs over the horizon. In the streets are fewer passers-by.

Behind this curtain of our city that has become an actual battleground, beyond the duel of narrow Straits or the struggle of the Middle Sea, drama is moving even more grimly in men's minds than it moves bodily in the masses who grope for bread or light or lodging. Individual men and women, utterly isolated and often without word or

knowledge of those nearest to them, cut off from their fellow-strangers by mistrust and from every reasonable orientation by tyranny, are looking out from the stage on which their tragedy is played and asking themselves if any spectator any longer lives to see and understand it, or if all the world together must be plunged into the action.

Such isolation is a doom of the time that has come upon us, and we need not relate it too closely to military conquest or political circumstance or the ending of travel. It is linked with all of them together. More people stand alone than ever before, that is the simple European fact. Disintegration of the community, inhibition of movement, withdrawal of the individual into himself are three direct consequences of the assumption by the State of increased powers. Over tracts of thousands of miles solitary men and women, facing elementary problems, are the sole survivors (though they exist in multitude) of what yesterday was called civilization. So far we have already moved toward the condition of life that Wells described in *Things to Come*. By a supreme effort, Western man will prevent a disaster in which he himself could become a solitary cave-dweller among ruins, harnessing ox or ass to his former car and going out to scratch for roots in untilled fields. He will save himself and the world ; but his task for a generation will be to restore the place of the individual in social life and yet to sustain the fabric of the community. Though it may be a commonplace of current thought, I try to put this down because it is a deep concern of the dramatist. The world of which he must write has already changed basically and not in any superficial consequence of "one more war".

And I am pausing here finally to think of the relation of drama to the future, the period of time that has always interested me most.

To a writer action and thought, dream and perception are all one, or should be so. Some man's eyes must see, or try to search out, the drama that is played within the proscenium of outward fact. A new figure stands on the stage, the protagonist and hero of to-day's action, the figure of solitary man on whom the blow of an evil fate has fallen. The calamity was foreign to his own life and came against his will : certainly he never brought it on himself by any frenzy of nationalism or greed. None the less he feels a spiritual responsibility for its happening at all, for its ever having been allowed to happen ; and such a consciousness relates him, as a citizen of any country, to the figures of Greek tragedy who carried their burden of guilt from one generation to the next. This consciousness, again, ensures final expiation and the making of all things clear, even without the agency of a Messenger coming in haste, like one of the bearded Attic goatherds toward the close of the drama, to interpret the riddle of the plot. With or without the god from the machine, with or without a personal faith in anything but age-long justice, this solitary man stands in his own right, resolved to wrest from the struggle a meaning and a solution.

Yes, we shall ask the dramatist to mark this man and bring him on to the physical stage of the theatre and let him speak for himself ; which does not imply starting again the old kind of dramatic argument about politics or economics which used to be mistaken for dramatic conflict because

it was wittily conducted on the stage. Let this man speak from his own solitude of what has befallen him. His is the figure we salute while freedom remains to us, and would salute in servitude if we were brought to such a pass.

When he speaks in the theatre, this man whom we might call simply Agonistes will use words of poetry as well as prose, and he will be exciting and entertaining as well as moving. He will certainly talk to himself in the form of soliloquy without asking whether or not a realistic probability requires it ; and he may have other voices to speak for him in the shape of the Chorus, which is not merely a ritual survival in the theatre but a living instrument used effectively by dramatic poets of our time. Chorus speaks directly to the listener and spectator, where characters in the ordinary play speak to him indirectly through their dialogue with each other. Chorus is the highest means of declaration and commentary. There will be Chorus in comedy as well as tragedy, which need not be proportionately the dominant form of the theatre, although its restoration in full sweep and power is certain.

Many dramatic developments of this kind could have been forecast years ago, and some of them had already come about ; but now we are entering a world of general renewal in which the renewal of theatre will play a definite part, and that must hasten them greatly. Assent, rather than dissent, will govern the creative mind. This is to look forward boldly, but not blindly. The matters on which men agree count for more than those on which they differ. Where no standards are, there is no tragedy and no comedy and no theatre at all. Solitary man, issuing victorious from

an ideological struggle in which one combatant would deny him individual right and the other has not yet determined how widely or how soon it shall be granted, will erect the standards for himself. And in the theatre Auden had already spoken for him in *The Ascent of F.6* as long ago as 1937 :

O you, who are the history and the creator  
Of all those forms in which we are condemned to suffer ;  
To whom the intelligent and necessary is also the just ;  
Show me my path, show all of us, that each upon  
This mortal star may feel himself the danger  
That under his hand is softly palpitating.  
Quieten that hand, interpret fully the commands  
Of the four centres and the four conflicting winds,  
Those torn between the charities O reconcile,  
And to the human vision lead of one great meaning,  
Linking the living with the dead, within the shadow  
Of which uplifting, loving and constraining power  
All other reasons do rejoice and operate.

This is said by a character in a modern play ; and when drama is once so imagined it creates a theatre for itself. So it is needless for me to prolong this narrative by saying just how I foresee the future of the physical playhouse, its architecture and stage, and the players and directors who will work in it. I think the changes in respect of all of them will be fundamental. The first is likely to be a rebirth of simplicity based upon poverty, which may seem at first to narrow the horizon of the theatre but in effect will widen it fully by throwing the dramatist first of all, and after him the actors and director, back upon the resource of imagination.

I have tried in this book to do two things I have never

done before : to look backward and to write about myself. Both have been simpler than I anticipated ; and perhaps for the reason that both have been concerned with the truth of art as I see it, and not with the much more miscellaneous and perplexing " truth " about life. The record has been integral, but it does not pretend to generality in the personal or any other sense. Looking backward is a thing I have enjoyed because the scene of movement has so often taken the shape of theatre ; yet I do not want to see this play of outer life again. I have seen it once and profited by the entertainment and that is enough. What is to come absorbs me far more, for the act of preparation and the development of the drama are over, and I find nothing forbidding in the word catastrophe, which means only solution and clarification, whether through a Messenger or otherwise. Actually I would wish nothing better for myself than now, in this opening of the new drama which follows the conclusion of the old, to take the character of solitary man and join him as comrade in his anonymous, unbroken and not unfriendly ranks.

## INDEX

- Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 155-6, 240  
 Achurch, Janet, 6, 85  
 Amico, Silvio d', 191, 241  
 Amiel, Denys, 109, 190  
 Archer, William, 35-6, 80-81  
 Armstrong, William, 121  
 Ashcroft, Peggy, 149, 154  
 Athens, 141-4  
 Auden, W. H., 202, 209-10, 220, 247  
 Ballet Club, 154, 159  
 Ballet Jooss, 176  
 Bary, Gaston, 64, 109, 122, 136  
 Baylis, Lilian, 157, 208  
 Becque, Henry, 109, 185  
 Benavente, Jacinto, 65  
 Bennett, Arnold, 42, 194-5  
 Berkeley, Calif., 166-8  
 Berlin, theatres, 172-3, 175, 181-4, 185-6  
 Bernard, J. J., and Tristan, 109  
 Besier, Rudolf, 32, 202  
 Boston, Mass., 234-5  
 Bridie, James, 157  
 Brooke, Rupert, 31-2, 45  
 Brown, John Mason, 92  
 Browne, E. Martin, 203-8  
 Browne, Maurice, 148  
 Bruckner, Ferdinand, 158  
 Burgtheater, Vienna, 24, 104-6, 124-6  
 Caine, Hall, 195  
 Cambridge Festival Theatre, 109, 119, 121, 161  
 Canterbury Festival, 204-5  
 Capek, Josef, 127  
 Carlsbad, 127-8  
 Carroll, Sydney, 180, 217  
 Censorship of Plays, 9  
 Charrington, Charles, 85  
 Charrington, Nora, 85  
 Chekhov, Anton, 35-6, 220, 231  
 Chinese Theatre, San Francisco, 168-9  
 Cologne, theatres, 51-5  
 Compagnie des Quinze, 157-8, 161  
 Copeau, Jacques, 64, 135, 158, 197  
 Corfu, 140  
 Court Theatre, 7-8  
 Coward, Noel, 65, 92, 161  
 Craig, Edward Gordon, 66, 137-138, 197  
 Crystal Palace, 55  
 Cured, François de, 88  
 Curie, Mme., 70  
 Curle, Richard, 41



# THE SCENE IS CHANGED

- Denham, Reginald, 146  
 Diaghilev, Serge, 66, 155  
 Drinkwater, John, 62  
 Dublin, 155-6  
 Duhamel, Georges, 64  
 Dullin, Georges, 64, 109
- Eliot, T. S., 41, 202-5, 211  
*Elizabeth of England*, 158-9  
 Elsenborn Camp, 50-51  
 Epidaurus, Theatre of, 142  
 Epstein, Jacob, 41  
 Ervine, St. John, 8, 80  
 Everyman Theatre, 65, 88  
 Expressionism, 51-2
- Fabian Society, 8  
 Farquharson, Robert, 120, 146  
 Feuchtwanger, Lion, 131-4  
 Flecker, James Elroy, 82  
 Florence, 225-7  
 Fogerty, Elsie, 205  
 France, Anatole, 43  
 Frohman Repertory, 33
- Gantillon, Simon, 109, 122, 162  
 Gate Theatre Studio, 119, 122  
 Gaudier-Brzeska, 41  
 Génier, Firmin, 108  
 Gielgud, John, 120, 202-3, 231, 239  
 Giraudoux, Jean, 175-6  
 Glyndebourne, 189  
 Godfrey, Peter, 122  
 Granville-Barker, H., 7, 42, 202  
 Gray, Terence, 121-2  
 Gregor, Josef, 126, 197  
 Gropius, Walter, 191  
 Guitry, Lucien, 3  
 Guitry, Sacha, 111
- Hall, Anmer, 159  
 Hammond, Aubrey, 88, 91  
 Harrison, Frederick, 89  
 Hauptmann, Gerhart, 78-9, 172  
 Hellbrunn, 123  
 Hicks, Seymour, 185  
 Hilpert, Heinz, 158, 183  
 Hollywood, Calif., 170-71  
 Howard, Sidney, 92, 111  
 Hulme, T. E., 40-42, 45
- Isherwood, Christopher, 204, 209,  
 220
- Jackson, Sir Barry, 121, 149  
*Jew Süss*, 131-4, 148, 151-3  
 Jouvet, Louis, 64, 109, 136, 175
- Kaiser, Georg, 54, 58, 63  
 Karsavina, Tamara, 36  
 Kataev, Valentin, 185  
 Komisarjevsky, Theodore, 111, 120  
 Kommer, Dr. Hugo, 113  
 Kropotkin, Prince, 8
- Lang, Matheson, 45, 119-20, 131-  
 132, 151-2  
 Langer, Frantisek, 127  
 Laughton, Charles, 120, 181  
 Leigh, Vivien, 217-18  
 Lenormand, H. R., 109, 136, 219  
 Lyric, Hammersmith, 61-2, 68
- Macdermott, Norman, 65, 88  
 Macleish, Archibald, 208-9  
*Man with a Load of Mischief*, *The*,  
 86-95, 125-6, 171, 180  
 Maddermarket, Norwich, 79, 147  
 Malvern Festival, 149-50, 157

# INDEX

- Mandragola*, 17, 240-41  
 Marinetti, 191, 197, 228  
 Marsh, Sir Edward, 32  
 Marshall, Norman, 122  
 Maugham, W. S., 31, 60, 73  
 Mercury Theatre, 4-5, 181, 185,  
     203-4, 206-15, 218-19, 223-4,  
     239-41  
 Miller, Gilbert, 120, 235, 238-9  
 Mitchelhill, J. P., 207  
 Mittersill, Schloss, 222  
 Moissi, Alexander, 111, 128  
 Monck, Nugent, 79  
 Monte Carlo, 115-6  
 Morgan, Charles, 239  
 Munich, 12-25, 69, 78  
 Munro, C. K., 72-3  
*Murder in the Cathedral*, 204-8,  
     232-7  
  
 Naples, 139  
 National Theatre, 230-31  
 Neumann, Alfred, 118-20, 238  
 Nevinson, C. R. W., 41  
*New Age, The*, 30, 40  
 New York, 91-2, 162, 207, 237  
 Nijinsky, Vaslav, 36  
  
 Oberammergau, 187-8  
 Obey, André, 157  
 O'Casey, Sean, 111, 148, 156, 202  
 Old Vic, 45, 80, 181, 208, 220  
 Olympic Games, 170  
 O'Neill, Eugene, 65, 175  
  
 Pallenberg, Max, 111, 128, 177  
 Panama Canal, 163-4  
 Percy, Esme, 55  
 Petrolini, 198  
  
 Phoenix, the, 62-3  
 Pirandello, Luigi, 71, 191, 198  
 Piscator, Erwin, 129-30, 145, 238-  
     239  
 Pitoëff, Georges, 64, 109  
*Playboy of the Western World*, 39,  
     239-40  
 Playfair, Sir Nigel, 68, 88  
 Poetic Drama, 201-15  
 Prague, 127  
 Priestley, J. B., 216-17  
 Printemps, Yvonne, 111  
  
 Rambert, Marie, *the author's wife*,  
     5, 147, 154  
 Reinhardt, Max, 34-5, 75, 106-7,  
     112-13, 145, 161, 177  
 Réjane, Mme., 3  
 Rice, Elmer, 64  
 Ricketts, Charles, 158  
 Robinson, Lennox, 156  
 Romain, Jules, 64, 119, 136, 190  
 Rome, Convegno Volta, 190-200  
 Rothe, Hans, 128, 186  
 Russian Ballet, 36-7, 65-6  
  
 Sadler's Wells, 156-7  
 Saint-Denis, Michel, 157, 231-2  
 Salten, Felix, 106  
 Salzburg Festival, 111-13, 123-4,  
     145, 176-8, 218-19  
 San Francisco, 165-70  
 Seignobos, Professor, 70  
 Shaw, G. B., 7, 10, 23-4, 35-6,  
     61, 68, 134, 149  
 Sherriff, R. C., 148  
 Siena, the *Palio*, 226-8  
 Sorge, Reinhard, 51-2  
 Speaight, Robert, 205

## THE SCENE IS CHANGED

Stage Society, 32, 43, 72-3, 79,  
88-9, 119, 122  
Stendhal, 28-9, 38  
Sternheim, Carl, 217-18  
Stratford Festival, 150, 161  
*Such Men are Dangerous*, 120-21,  
131  
*Sumurun*, 34-5  
Synge, J. M., 39, 155-6, 239-40  
  
Tairov, A., 191, 198  
*Theatre Arts*, 82-3, 154  
Thimig Family, the, 107, 113  
Toller, Ernst, 57, 73-8, 129-30  
  
Vatican City, 195-6  
Vaucluse, 136-7, 229  
Venice, 114-15, 178-9

Vieux-Colombier, 64  
Vildrac, Charles, 64  
  
Walkley, A. B., 44, 79-80  
War of 1914-18, 45-7  
Wedekind, Frank, 17, 129  
Welles, Orson, 212  
Wells, H. G., 10, 220, 244  
Whitworth, Geoffrey, 81  
Wilder, Thornton, 101, 235  
Williams, Emllyn, 216  
Wolfe, Humbert, 209  
  
Yeats, W. B., 190, 197, 203, 240  
Yosemite Valley, 170  
Young, Stark, 92, 94  
  
Zurich, 25-30



THE END

Acc No.	20390
Class No	G. 4.
Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, Edinburgh.	
BOOK N.	

2P802

. 7